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Adventure

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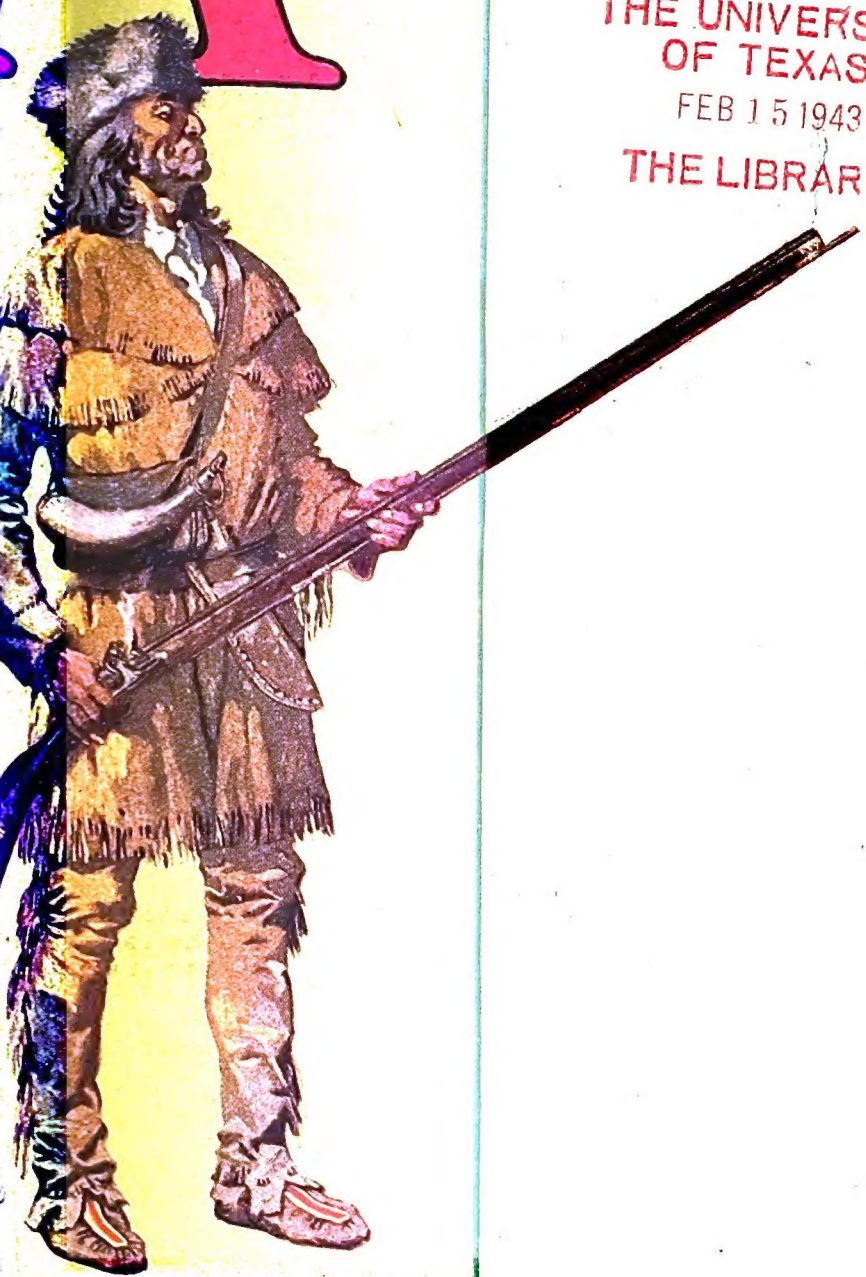

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Adventure

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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

CONTENTS FOR MID-OCTOBER ISSUE 1917

Hira Singh's Tale *A Four-Part Story. Part I* . . . . . **Talbot Mundy** 3

To an Indian regiment its honor is sacred; its pride paramount. When the war call comes to India, the Sikhs, the fighting hillmen, are among the first to answer, but *Squadron D* is troubled. Suspicion and rumor coupled with the mysterious conduct of their native commander, *Ranjoor Singh*, causes the most faithful to doubt. And when they sail from Bombay without him their thoughts are bitter.

Into the Hills . . . . . **Hapsburg Liebe** 43

Ten-Spot Tifton proudly holds the championship of the Lower Bad Ax Creek logging-camps; but besides being a fighter this Tennessee mountaineer is a man every inch of him.

The Avenging Sea . . . . . **Captain A. E. Dingle** 51

Of the thousands who follow the sea for a livelihood there are always a few who play the rôle of harpies and ghouls. But fortunately they do not understand their great mistress, so tales like this are told.

His Decennial Curse . . . . . **Theodore Seixas Solomons** 58

When the hitherto reliable sheriff begins filling the main street with haphazard shots and maudlin song, Sapphire City, Alaska, realizes its helplessness—and welcomes an unexpected champion.

The Song of the Wanderer *Poem* . . . . . **Ed. L. Carson** 64

A Leak in the Big Dipper . . . . . **Douglas S. Watson** 65

When *Burrell Cranston* finds the sluice-boxes being tampered with at night his suspicions are aroused. His plan for uncovering the unaccountable shortage from the Big Dipper gold-mine will interest you.

From the Seas *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **J. Allan Dunn** 74

"Ye need fear death from no living man or woman," predicted the voodoo witch, and with her prophecy in mind *Captain Cypher* believed he could lead his band of pirates to pillage and murder with impunity. But the witch had predicted further.

A Matter of Altruism . . . . . **William Dudley Pelley** 102

Is patriotism a fallacy? Is government all graft and corruption? Old *Ben Wheeler*, Vermont munitions-maker firmly believes so—until he meets a ten-year-old boy and a common yellow dog.

The Diary of a Pack-Mule . . . . . **Buck Connor** 111

Old Gabe is just an ordinary Army mule, but his diary relating his trip across the ocean and his experiences in the Philippines may throw an added light on the character of his species.

For France . . . . . **Nevil G. Henshaw** 122

Just one of the many unsung sacrifices exacted by the World War.

Gaston Olaf and Big Business *A Four-Part Story. Conclusion* . . **Henry Oyen** 123

In the conclusion of this thrilling story of the North woods, the great struggle between man and corporation reaches its height and finally resolves itself into the real fight of the North—man to man.

(Continued on next page)

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(*Continued from preceding page*)

Tactics . . . . . **G. A. Wells** 142
The Red and Blue fleets are furiously contesting theoretical war for the possession of Boston Harbor. But being only a theoretical war the Reds stop to rescue a fisherman adrift at sea—with strange results.

The Old Prospector *Poem* . . . . . **Mary Carolyn Davies** 146

The Old-Timer . . . . . **Russell A. Boggs** 147
Tom Deming realizes that the time when he will have to "resign" his telegraph is rapidly approaching —and he has a wife and children but no other trade. But——

Billy June and The Sinews of War . . . . . **Wilbur Hall** 155
Billy June knows Latin-American diplomats and revolutionists thoroughly; learning their schemes, plans and methods is his trade. But in Rio de Janeiro he enters a new adventure that leads him over a long trail.

The Strength of the Gentle . . . . . **Harold Titus** 171
Karl was always quiet, reticent and gentle but when the time comes for strength, on the crumbling ice of Lake Michigan, a change takes place.

The Camp-Fire A Free-to-All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers 180

Adventure's Free Services and Addresses 187

Ask Adventure 188

Lost Trails 191

Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . . **C. B. Falls**

THE NEXT ADVENTURE

Two weeks from now, October 3, the First November *Adventure* will take you to many places—to Alaska, to Tennessee, Turkey, Missouri, to Cossack Russia of the old days, Montana, the Philippines, to the Kentucky of Daniel Boone's day, Peru, Canada and to the Caribbean Sea.

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PRECEDENTS IN PIPEROCK By W. C. TUTTLE

Because Piperock decides on a safe-and-sane Fourth, there is half an hour of hearty fun in store for you.

For other features in the coming number, turn to the Trail Ahead, page 192

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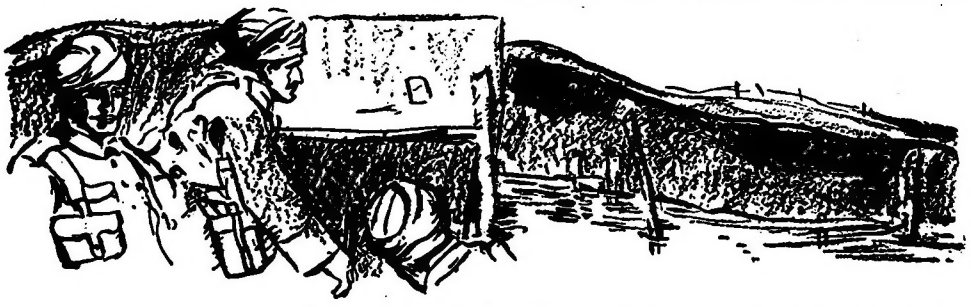
HIRA SINGH'S TALE



A FOUR-PART STORY - PART I

by TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "The Soul of a Regiment," "The Damned Old Nigger," etc.

CHAPTER I

Let a man, an arrow, and an answer each go straight. Each is his own witness. God is judge.—*Eastern Proverb.*

WE SIKHS have a proverb, sahib, that the ruler and the ruled are one. That has many sides to it, of which one is this: India having many moods and minds, the British are versatile. Not altogether wise, for who is? When for instance did India make an end of wooing foolishness? Since the British rule India they may wear her flowers, but they drink her dregs. They may bear her honors, but her blame as well. As the head is to the body, the ruler and the ruled are one.

Yet as I understand it, when this great war came there was disappointment in some quarters and surprise in others because we, who were known not to be contented, did not rise at once in rebellion. To that the answer is that faith finds faith. It is the great gift of the British that they set faith in the hearts of other men.

Those were dark hours, sahib, when the censorship shut down on us, and there were a thousand rumors for every one known fact. There had come a sudden swarm of Sikhs from abroad, and of other men—all hirelings—who talked much about Germany and a change of masters. There were dark sayings, and arrests by night. Men with whom we talked at dusk had disappeared at dawn. Ranjoor Singh, not yet bahadur but rissaldar-major commanding squadron D of my regiment, Outram's Own, became very busy in the bazaars; and many a night I followed him, not always with his knowledge. I found nothing against him.

Ours is more like the French than the British system; there is more intercourse between officer and non-commissioned officer and man. But Ranjoor Singh is a silent man and we of his squadron, though we respected him, knew little of what was in his mind. When there began to be talk about his knowing German, and about his secrecy, and about nights in the bazaar, who could answer? We all knew he knew German.

There were printed pamphlets from God-knew-where, and letters from America, that made pretense at explanations; and there were spies who whispered. My voice, saying I had listened and seen and that I trusted, was as a quail's note when the

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monsoon bursts. None heard; so that in the end I held my tongue. I even began to doubt.

Then a trooper of ours was murdered in the bazaar, and Ranjoor Singh's servant disappeared. Within an hour Ranjoor Singh was gone too. Then came news of war. Then our officers came among us to ask whether we were willing or not to take a hand in this great quarrel. Perhaps in that hour if they had not asked us we might have judged that we and they were not one after all.

But they did ask, and let a man, an arrow, and an answer each go straight, say we. Our Guru says Sikhs should fight ever on the side of the oppressed; the weaker the oppressed, the more the reason for our taking part with them. Our officers made no secret with us about the strength of the enemy, and we made none with them of our feeling in the matter. They were proud men that day. Colonel Kirby was a very proud man. We were prouder than he, except when we thought of Ranjoor Singh.

Then, as it were out of the night itself, there came a message by word of mouth from Ranjoor Singh saying he will be with us before the blood shall run. We were overjoyed at that; yet when dawn came doubt again had hold of us. Once, at least a squadron of us had loved him to the death because we thought him an example of Sikh honor. Now only I and our British officers believed in him.

We are light cavalry. We were first of all the Indian regiments to ride out of Delhi and entrain at a station down the line. That was an honor and the other squadrons rode gaily, but D Squadron hung its head. I heard men muttering in the ranks and some I rebuked to silence, but my rebukes lightened no man's heart. In place of Ranjoor Singh rode Captain Fellowes promoted from another squadron, and noticing our lack of spirit he did his best to inspire us with fine words and manly bearing; but we felt ashamed that our own Sikh major was not leading us, and did not respond to encouragement.

Yet when we rode out of Delhi Gate it was as if a miracle took place. A stiffening passed along the squadron. A trooper caught sight of Ranjoor Singh standing beside some bullock carts, and passed the word. I, too, saw him. He was with a Mohammedan bunnia, and was dressed to resemble one himself.

The trooper who was first to see him—a sharp-eyed man—he died at Ypres—Singh means lion, sahib—now recognized the man who stood with him.

"That bunnia," said he, "is surely none other than the European who gave us the newspaper clippings about Sikhs not allowed to land in Canada. See—he is disguised like a fool. Are the police asleep," said he, "that such thieves dare sun themselves?"

It was true enough, sahib. The man in disguise was German, and we remembered again that Ranjoor Singh knew German. From that moment we rode like new men—I too, although I because I trusted Ranjoor Singh now more than ever; they, because they trusted no longer at all, and he can shoulder what seem certainties whom doubt unmans. No word, but a thought that a man could feel passed all down the line, that whatever our officer might descend to being, the rank and file would prove themselves faithful to the salt. Thenceforward there was nothing in our bearing to cause our officers anxiety.

You might wonder, sahib, why none broke ranks to expose both men on the spot. I did not because I trusted Ranjoor Singh. I reasoned he would never have dared be seen by us if he truly were a traitor. I judged his heart must burn to be riding with us. They did not because they would not willingly have borne the shame. I tell no secret when I say there has been treason in the Punjab; the whole world knows that. Yet few understand that the cloak under which it all made headway was the pride of us true ones, who would not own to treason in our midst. Pride and the shadow of shame are one, sahib, but who believes it until the shame bears fruit?

Before the last squadron had ridden by, Captain Warrington our adjutant also caught sight of Ranjoor Singh. He spurred after Colonel Kirby, and Colonel Kirby came galloping back; but before he could reach Delhi Gate Ranjoor Singh had disappeared, and D Squadron was glad to the last man.

"Let us hope he may die like a rat in a hole and bring no more shame on us!" said Gooja Singh, and there was a chorus of assent.

"He said he will be with us before the blood shall run!" said I.

"Then we know whose blood shall run

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first!" said the trooper nearest me, and those who heard him laughed.

So I held my tongue, for there is no need of argument while a man yet lives to prove himself. I had charge of the party that burned that trooper's body. He was one of the first to fall after we reached France.

Colonel Kirby, looking none too pleased, came trotting back to us, and we rode on. And we entrained. Later on we boarded a great ship in Bombay harbor and put to sea, most of us thinking of families and children, and some no doubt of money-lenders who might foreclose on property in our absence, none yet suspecting that the Government will take steps to prevent that. It is not only the British officer, sahib, who borrows money at high interest lest his shabbiness shame the regiment.

WE WERE at sea almost before the horses were stalled properly, and presently there were officers and men and horses all sick together in the belly of the ship, with chests and bales and barrels broken loose among us. The this-and-that-way motion of the ship caused horses to fall down, and men were too sick to help them up again. I myself lay amid dung like a dead man—yet vomiting as no dead man ever did—and saw British officers as sick as I laboring like troopers. There are more reasons than one why we Sikhs respect our British officers.

The coverings of the ship were shut tight, lest the waves descend among us. The stench became indescribable, although we learned to know a worse one later. It seemed to us like a poor beginning, and that thought put little heart in us.

But the sickness began to lessen after certain days, and as the movement grew easier the horses were able to stand. Then we became hungry, who had thought we would never wish to eat again, and double rations were served out. Then a few men sought the air, and others—I among them—went out of curiosity to see why the first did not return. So, first by dozens and then by hundreds, we went and stood full of wonder, holding to the bulwark for the sake of steadiness.

It may be, sahib, that if I had the tongue of a woman and of a priest and of an advocate—three tongues in one—I might then tell the half of what there was to wonder at on that long journey. Surely not otherwise. Being a soldier, well trained in all but speech, I can not tell the hundredth part.

We were but one ship among a number. The ships proceeded after this manner—see, I draw a pattern—with foam boiling about each. Ahead of us were British troops—cavalry, infantry, and guns. To our right and left and behind us were Sikh, Gurkha, Dogra, Pathan, Punjabi, Rajput—many men, on many ships. Two-and-thirty ships I counted at one time, and there was the smoke of others over the skyline!

Above the bulwark of each ship, all the way along it, thus, was a line of khaki. Ahead of us, that was helmets. To our right and left and behind us it was turbans. The men of each ship wondered at all the others. And most of all I think we wondered at the great gray war-ships plunging in the distance; for none knew whence they had come; we saw none in Bombay when we started. It was not a sight for the tongue to explain, sahib, but for a man to carry in his heart. A sight never to be forgotten. I heard no more talk about a poor beginning.

We came to Aden, and took on coal and water. There was no sign of excitement there, yet no good news. It was put in Orders of the Day that the Allies are doing as well as can be expected pending arrival of reinforcements; and that is not the way winners speak. Later, when we had left Aden behind, our officers came down among us and confessed that all did not go well. We said brave things to encourage them, for it is not good that one's officers should doubt. If a rider doubts his horse, what faith shall the horse have in his rider? And so it is with a regiment and its officers.

After some days we reached a narrow sea—the Red Sea men call it, although God knows why—a place full of heat and sandstorms, shut in on either hand by barren hills. We passed islands where men ran down to the beach to shout and wave helmets—unshaven Englishmen, who trim the lights. It must have been their first intimation of any war. How else can they have known of it? We roared back to them, all the men on all the ships together, until the Red Sea was the home of thunder, and our ships' whistles screamed them official greeting through the din.

Never was such a sight, sahib! Behind our ships was darkness, for the wind was from the north and the funnels belched forth

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smoke that trailed and spread. I watched it with fascination, until one day Gooja Singh came and watched beside me near the stern—his rank was the same as mine although I was more than a year his senior. There was never too much love between him and me; step by step I earned promotion first, and he was jealous. But on the face of things we were friends. Said he to me, gazing at the smoke:

"I think there is a curtain drawn. We shall never return by that road!"

I laughed at him.

"Look rather ahead!" said I. "Let us leave our rear to the sweepers and the crows!"

Nevertheless, what he had said remained in my mind, as the way of dark sayings is. He proved right in the end, yet gained what? Behold me; and where is Gooja Singh? I made no prophecy, and he did. Can the sahib explain?

Day after day we kept overtaking other ships, most of them hurrying the same way as ourselves. And although not all were British, the crews all cheered us and we answered, the air above our heads alive with waving arms and our trumpets going as if we rode to the King of England's wedding. If their hearts burned as ours did, the crews of those ships were given something worth remembering.

We reached Suez, and anchored there. At Suez lay many ships in front of us, and a great gray battle-ship saluted us with guns, we all standing to attention while our ensigns dipped. I thought it strange that the battle-ship should salute us first, until I recalled how when I was a little fellow I once saw a viceroy salute my grandfather. My grandfather was one of those Sikhs who marched to the Ridge at Delhi when the British cause seemed lost. The British have long memories for such things.

Later there came an officer from the battle-ship and there was hot argument on our upper bridge. The captain of our ship grew very angry, but the officer from the battle-ship remained polite, and presently he took away with him certain of our stokers. The captain of our ship shouted after him that there were only weaklings and devil's leavings left, but later we discovered that was not true.

We fretted at delay at Suez. Ships may only enter the canal one by one, and while we waited some Arabs found their way on board from a small boat, pretending to sell fruit and trinkets. They assured us that the French and British were already badly beaten, and that Belgium had ceased to be. To test them we asked where Belgium was, and they did not know; but swore it had ceased to be. They advised us to mutiny and refuse to go on to our destruction.

They ought to have been arrested, but we were angry and drove them from the ship with blows. We upset their little boat by hauling at the rope with which they had made it fast, and they were forced to swim for shore. One of them was taken by a shark, which we considered an excellent omen, and the others were captured as they swam and taken ashore in custody.

I think others must have visited the other ships with similar tales to tell, because after that, sahib, there was something such as I think the world never saw before that day. In that great fleet of ships we were men of many creeds and tongues—Sikh, Mohammedan, Dogra, Gurkha—the Dogra and Gurkha be both Hindu, though of different kinds—Jat, Punjabi, Guzerati, Pathan, Mahratta—who can recall how many! No one language could have sufficed to explain one thought to all of us—no, nor yet ten languages! No word passed that my ear caught. Yet, ship after ship became aware of closer unity.

All on our knees on all the ships together we prayed thereafter thrice a day, our British officers standing bareheaded beneath the upper awnings, the chin-strap marks showing very plainly on their cheeks as the way of the British is when they feel emotion. We prayed, sahib, lest the war be over before we could come and do our share. I think there was no fear in all that fleet except the fear lest we come too late. A man might say with truth that we prayed to more gods than one, but our prayer was one. And we received one answer.

ONE morning our ship got up anchor unexpectedly and began to enter the canal. The men on the other ships bayed to us like packs of wolves, in part to give encouragement but principally jealous. We began to expect to see France now at any minute—I, who can draw a map of the world and set the chief cities in the proper place, being as foolish as the rest. There lay work as well as distance between us and France.

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We began to pass men making the canal banks ready against attack, but mostly they had no news to give us. Yet at one place, where we tied to the bank because of delay ahead, a man shouted from a sand-dune that the Kaiser of Germany had turned Mohammedan and now summons all Islam to destroy the French and British. Doubtless he mistook us for Mohammedans, being neither the first nor last to make that mistake.

So we answered him we were on our way to Berlin to teach the Kaiser his new creed. One man threw a lump of coal at him and he disappeared, but presently we heard him shouting to the men on the ship behind. They truly were Mohammedans, but they jeered at him as loud as we.

After that our officers set us to leading horses up and down the deck in relays, partly no doubt to keep us from talking with other men on shore, but also for the horses' sake. I remember how flies came on board and troubled the horses very much. At sea we had forgotten there were such things as flies, and they left us again when we left the canal.

At Port Said, which looks like a mean place, we stopped again for coal. Naked, black men, as tall as I and as straight, carried it up an inclined plank and cast it by basketfuls through openings in the ship's side. We made up a purse of money for them, both officers and men contributing, and I was told there was a coaling record broken.

After that we steamed at great speed along another sea, one ship at a time just as we left the canal, our ship leading all those that bore Indian troops. And now there were other war-ships—little ones, each of many funnels—low in the water, yet high at the nose—most swift, that guarded us on every hand, coming and going as the sharks do when they search the seas for food.

A wonder of a sight, sahib! Blue water—blue water—bluest ever I saw, who have seen lake water in the hills! And all the ships belching black smoke, and throwing up pure white foam—and the last ship so far behind that only masts and smoke were visible above the skyline—but more, we knew, behind that again, and yet more coming! I watched for hours at a stretch without weariness, and thought again of Ranjoor Singh. Surely, thought I, his three campaigns entitled him to this. Surely he was a better man than I. Yet here was I, and no man knew where he was. But when I spoke of Ranjoor Singh men spat, so I said nothing.

After a time I begged leave to descend an iron ladder, and sat on the lowest rung watching the British firemen at the furnaces. They cursed me in the name of God, their teeth and the whites of their eyes gleaming, but their skin black as night with coal dust. The sweat ran down in rivers between ridges of grime on the skin of their naked bellies. When a bell rang and the fire doors opened they glowed like pictures I have seen of devils. They were shadows when the doors clanged shut again. Considering them, I judged that they and we were one.

I climbed on deck again and spoke to a rissaldar. He spoke to Colonel Kirby. Watching, I saw Colonel Kirby nod—thus, like a bird that takes an insect; and he went and spoke to the captain of the ship. Presently there was consultation, and presently a call for volunteers, to which the whole regiment responded. None, however, gave me credit for the thought. I think that rissaldar accepted praise for it, but I have had no opportunity to ask him. He died in Flanders.

We carried coal as ants that build a hill, piling it on the iron floor faster than the stokers could use it, toiling nearly naked like them lest we spoil our uniforms. We grew grimy, but the ship shook, and the water boiled behind us. None of the other ships was able to overtake us, although we doubted not they all tried.

There grew great good-will between us and the stokers. We were clumsy from inexperience, and they full of laughter at us, but each judged the spirit with which the other labored. Once, where I stood directing near the bunker door, two men fell on me and covered me with coal. The stokers laughed and I was angry. I had hot words ready on my tongue, but a rissaldar prevented me.

"This is their trade, not ours," said he. "Look to it lest any laugh at us when the time for our own trade comes!"

I judged that well spoken, and remembered it.

There came at last a morning with scent in it that set the horses in the hold to snorting—a dawn, sahib, such as a man remembers to judge other dawns by. That day we came in sight of France.

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Doubtless you suppose we cheered when we saw Marseilles at last. Yet I swear to you we were silent. We were disappointed because we could see no enemy and hear no firing of great guns! We made no more commotion than the dead while our ship steamed down the long harbor entrance, and was pushed and pulled by little tugs round a corner to a wharf. A French warship and some guns in a fort saluted us, and our ship answered; but on shore there seemed no excitement and our hearts sank. We thought that for all our praying we had come too late.

But the instant they raised a gangway a French officer and several British officers came running up it, and they all talked earnestly with Colonel Kirby on the upper bridge—we watching as if we had but an eye and an ear between us. Presently all our officers were summoned and told the news, and without one word being said to any of us we knew there was neither peace as yet, nor any surpassing victory fallen to our side. So then instantly we all began to speak at once, even as apes do when sudden fear has passed.

We imagined we were to be hurried at once toward the fighting, but not so, for the horses needed rest and exercise and proper food before they could be fit to carry us. Moreover, there were stores to be offloaded from the ships. When we had left the ships we were marched through the streets to a camp some little distance out along the Estague Road. Later in the day, and the next day and the next infantry from the other ships followed us, for they too had to wait for their stores.

The French seemed surprised to see us. They were women and children for the most part, for the grown men had been called up. In our country we greet friends with flowers, but we had been led to believe that Europe thinks little of such manners. Yet the French threw flowers to us, the little children bringing arms full and baskets full.

Thenceforward, day after day we rode at exercise, keeping ears and eyes open, and marveling at France. No man complained, although our very bones ached to be in active service. And no man spoke of Ranjoor Singh who should have led D Squadron. Yet I believe there was not one man in all D Squadron but thought of Ranjoor Singh all the time. He who has honor most at heart speaks least about it. In one way shame on Ranjoor Singh's account was a good thing, for it made the whole regiment watchful against treachery.

Treachery, sahib—we had yet to learn what treachery could be! Marseilles is a half-breed of a place, part Italian, part French. The work was being chiefly done by the Italians, now that all able-bodied Frenchmen were under arms. And Italy not yet in the war!

Sahib, I swear to you that all the spies in all the world seemed at that moment to be Italian, and all in Marseilles at once! There were spies who brought our stores. Spies who brought the hay. Spies among the women who walked through our lines to admire, accompanied by officers who were none too wide-awake if they were honest. You would not believe how many pamphlets reached us, printed in our tongue and some of them worded very cunningly.

There were men who could talk Hindustanee who whispered to us to surrender to the Germans, promising in that case kind treatment. The German kaiser, these men assured us, had truly turned Mohammedan; as if that were anything to Sikhs unless perhaps an additional notch against him! I was told they mistook the Mohammedans in another camp for Sikhs, and were spat on for their pains!

Nor were all the spies Italians after all. Our hearts went out to the French. We were glad to be on their side—glad to help them defend their country. I shall be glad to my dying day that I have struck a blow for France. Yet the only really dangerous man of all who tried to corrupt us in Marseilles was a French major, who could speak our tongue as well as I. He said with sorrow that the French were already as good as vanquished, and that he pitied us as lambs sent to the slaughter. The part, said he, of every wise man was to go over to the enemy before the day should come for paying penalties.

I told what he had said to me to a rissaldar, and the rissaldar spoke with Colonel Kirby. We heard—although I do not know whether it is true or not—that the major was shot that evening with his face to a wall. I do know that I, in company with several troopers was cross-examined by interpreters that day in presence of Colonel Kirby and a French general.

There began to be talk at last about Ranjoor Singh. I heard men say it was no

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great wonder after all that he should have turned traitor, for it was plain he must have been tempted cunningly. Yet there was no forgiveness for him. They grew proud that where he had failed they could stand firm; and there is no mercy in proud men's minds—nor much wisdom either.

AT LAST a day came—too soon for the horses, but none too soon for us—when we marched through the streets to entrain for the front. As we had marched first out of Delhi, so we marched first from Marseilles now. Only the British regiments from India were on ahead of us; we led the Indian-born contingent.

French wives and children, and some cripples, lined the streets to cheer and wave their handkerchiefs. We were on our way to help their husbands defend France and they honored us. It was our due. But can the sahib accept his due with a dry eye and a word in his throat? Nay! It is only ingratitude that a man can swallow unconcerned. No man spoke. We rode like graven images, and I think the French women wondered at our silence. I know that I, for one, felt extremely willing to die for France; and I thought of Ranjoor Singh and of how his heart, too, would have burned if he had been with us. With such thoughts as swelled in my own breast it was not in me to believe him false, whatever the rest might think.

D Squadron proved in good fortune that day, for they gave us a train of passenger coaches with seats, and our officers had a first-class coach in front. The other squadrons, and most of the other regiments, had to travel in open trucks, although none grumbled on that score. There was a French staff officer to each train, and he who rode in ours had an orderly who knew English; the orderly climbed in beside me and we rode miles together, talking all the time, he surprising me vastly more than I him. We exchanged information as two boys that play a game—I a move, then he a move, then I again, then he.

The game was at an end when neither could think of another question to ask; but he learned more than I. At the end I did not yet know what his religion was, but he knew a great deal about mine. On the other hand he told me all about their army and its close association between officers and men, and all the news he had about the fighting—which was not so very much—and what he thought of the British. He seemed to think very highly of the British, rather to his own surprise.

He told me he was a pastry-cook by trade, and said he could cook chupatties such as we eat; and he understood my explanation why Sikhs were riding in the front trains and Mohammedans behind—because Mohammedans must pray at fixed intervals and the trains must stop to let them do it. He understood wherein our Sikh prayer differs from that of Islam. Yet he refused to believe I am no polygamist. But that is nothing. Since then I have fought in a trench beside Englishmen who spoke of me as a savage; and I have seen wounded Germans writhe and scream because their officers had told them we Sikhs would eat them alive. Yes, not once but many times.

The journey was slow, for the line was choked with supply-trains needed at the front as badly as ourselves. Now and then trains waited in sidings to let us by, and by that means we became separated, our regiment leading all the others in the end by almost half a day. The din of engine whistles became so constant that we no longer noticed it.

But there was another din that did not grow familiar. Along the line next ours there came hurrying in the opposite direction train after train of wounded, traveling at great speed, each leaving a smell in its wake that set us all to spitting. And once in so often there came a train filled full of the sound of screaming. The first time, and the second time we believed it was ungreased axles, but after the third time we understood.

Then our officers came walking along the footboards, speaking to us through the windows and pretending to point out characteristics of the scenery; and we took great interest in the scenery, asking them the names of places and the purposes of things; for it is not good that one's officers should be other than arrogantly confident.

We were a night and a day, and a night and a part of a day on the journey, and men told us later we had done well to cross the length of France in that time. On the morning of the last day we began almost before it was light to hear the firing of great guns and the bursting of shells—like the thunder of the surf on Bombay Island in the

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Great Monsoon—one roar without intermission, yet full of pulsation.

I think it was midday when we drew up at last in a siding, where a French general waited with some French and British officers. Colonel Kirby spoke with the general, and then ordered us to detrain at once; and we did so very swiftly, men, and horses, and baggage. Many of us were men of more than one campaign, able to judge by this and by that how sorely we were needed. We knew what it means when the reinforcements look fit for the work in hand. The French general came and shook hands again with Colonel Kirby, and saluted us all most impressively.

We were spared all the business of caring for our own baggage. With a French staff officer to guide us we rode toward the sound of firing—at a walk, because within reasonable limits the farther our horses might be allowed to walk now the better they would be able to gallop with us later.

We rode along a road between straight trees scarred by shell-fire. There were shell-holes in the road, some of which had been filled with the first material handy, but some had to be avoided. We saw no dead bodies, nor even dead horses, although smashed gun-carriages and limbers and broken wagons were everywhere.

To our right and left was flat country, divided by low hedges and the same tall, straight trees; but far away in front was a forest, whose top just rose above the skyline. As we rode toward that we could see the shells bursting near it.

Between us and the forest there were British guns, dug in; and away to our right were French guns—batteries and batteries of them. And between us and the guns were great receiving stations for the wounded, with endless lines of stretcher-bearers like ants passing to and fro. By the din we knew that the battle stretched far away beyond sight to right and left of us.

Many things we saw that were unexpected. The speed of the artillery fire was unbelievable. But what surprised all of us most was the absence of reserves. Behind the guns and before the guns we passed many a place where reserves might have sheltered, but there were none.

There came two officers, one British and one French, galloping toward us who spoke excitedly with Colonel Kirby, but we continued at a walk and Colonel Kirby lit a fresh cheroot. After some time there came an aeroplane with a great square cross painted on its underside, and we were ordered to halt and keep quite still until it went away. When it was too far away for its man to distinguish us we began to trot at last, but it was growing dusk when we halted finally behind the forest—dusky and cloudy, the air full of smoke from the explosions, ill-smelling and difficult to breathe.

During the last three-quarters of a mile the shells had been bursting all about us, but we had only lost one man and a horse—and the man not killed. He had a leg blown off.

As it grew darker the enemy sent up star-shells and by their light we could sometimes see as plainly as by daylight. British infantry were holding the forest in front of us and a road that ran to right of it. Their rifle fire was steady as the roll of drums. These were not the regiments that preceded us from India. These were men who had been in the fighting from the first, and their wounded and the stretcher-bearers were surprised to see us. No word of our arrival seemed to reach the firing-line as yet. Men were too busy to pass news.

Over our heads, from a mile away behind, the British and French artillery were sending a storm of shells, and the enemy guns were answering two for one. And besides that, into the forest, and into the trench to the right of it there was falling such a cataract of fire that it was not possible to believe a man could live. Yet the answering rifle-fire never paused for a second.

I learned afterwards the name of the regiment in the trench nearest us. With these two eyes in the hills I once saw that same regiment run like a thousand hares into the night, because it had no supper and a dozen Afridi marksmen had the range. Can the sahib explain? I think I can. A man's spirit is no more in his belly than in the cart that carries his belongings; yet while he thinks it is, his enemies all flourish.

WE DISMOUNTED to rest the horses, and waited behind the forest until it grew so dark that between the bursting of the star-shells a man could not see his hand held out in front of him. Now and then a stray shell chanced among us, but our casualties were very few. I wondered greatly at the waste of ammunition. My ears ached with the din, but

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there seemed more noise wrought than destruction. We had begun to grow restless when an officer came galloping at last to Colonel Kirby's side and gave him directions with much pointing and waving of the arm.

Then Colonel Kirby summoned all our officers, and they rode back to tell us what the plan was. The din was so great by then that they were obliged to explain anew to each four men. This was the plan:

The Germans, ignorant of our arrival, undoubtedly believed the British infantry to be without support and were beginning to press forward in the hope of winning through to the railway line. The infantry on our right front, already overwhelmed by weight of artillery fire, would be obliged to evacuate their trench and fall back, thus imperiling the whole line, unless we could save the day.

Observe this, sahib; so—I make a drawing in the dust. Between the trench here, and the forest there, was a space of level ground some fifty or sixty yards wide. There was scarcely more than a furrow across it to protect the riflemen—nothing at all that could stop a horse. At a given signal the infantry were to draw aside from that piece of level land, like a curtain drawn back along a rod, and we were to charge through the gap between them and the forest, the shock of our charge and its unexpectedness serving instead of numbers.

Fine, old-fashioned tactics, sahib, that suited our mind well! There had been plenty on the voyage, including Gooja Singh, who argued we should all be turned into infantry the very day of our arrival, and we had dreaded that. Each to his own. A horseman prefers to fight on horseback with the weapons that he knows.

Perhaps the sahib has watched Sikh cavalry at night and wondered how so many men and horses could keep so still. Our silence became that of night itself. We had but one eye, one ear, one intellect among us. We were one! One with the night and with the work ahead!

One red light swinging near the corner of the forest was to mean *be ready!* We were ready as the fuse is for the match! Two red lights would mean that the sidewise movement by the infantry was under way. Three lights swinging together were to be our signal to begin. Sahib, I saw three red lights three thousand times between each minute and the next!

The shell-fire increased from both sides. Where the British infantry lay was such a lake of flame and din that the very earth seemed to burst apart; yet the answering rifle-fire was steady—steady as the roll of drums. Then we truly saw one red light, and "*EK!*" said we all at once. *Ek* means *one*, sahib, but it sounded like the opening of a breech-block.

"Mount!" ordered Colonel Kirby, and we mounted.

While I held my breath and watched for the second light I heard a new noise behind me, different from the rest, and therefore audible—a galloping horse and a challenge close at hand. I saw in the light of a bursting shell a Sikh officer, close followed by a trooper on a blown horse. I saw the officer ride to Colonel Kirby's side, rein in his charger, and salute. At that instant there swung two red lights, and "*DO!*" said the regiment. *Do* means *two*, sahib, but it sounded like the thump of ordnance.

"Draw sabers!" commanded Colonel Kirby, and the rear ranks drew. The front rank men had lances.

By the light of a star-shell I could plainly see the Sikh officer and trooper. I recognized the charger—a beast with the devil in him and the speed of wind. I recognized both men. I thought a shell must have struck me. I must be dead and in a new world. I let my horse edge nearer, not believing—until ears confirmed eyes. I heard Colonel Kirby speak, very loud indeed, as a man to whom good news comes.

"Ranjoor Singh!" said he; and he took him by the hand and wrung it. "Thank God!" he said, speaking from the heart as the British do at times when they forget that others listen. "Thank God, old man! You've come in the nick of time!"

So I was right, and my heart leapt in me. He was with us before the blood ran! Every man in the squadron recognized him now, and I knew every eye had watched to see Colonel Kirby draw saber and cut him down, for habit of thought is harder to bend than a steel bar. But I could feel the squadron coming round to my way of thinking as Colonel Kirby continued talking to him, obviously making him an explanation of our plan.

"Join your squadron, man—hurry!" I heard Colonel Kirby say at last, for I had let my horse draw very near them.

I had to rein back and make pretense my

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horse had been unruly, for Ranjoor Singh came riding toward us, showing his teeth in a great grin, and Captain Fellowes with a word of reproof thrown back to me spurred on to meet him.

"Hurrah, Major Ranjoor Singh!" said Captain Fellowes. "I'm —— glad to see you!"

That was a generous speech, sahib, from a man who must now yield command of the squadron, but Captain Fellowes had a heart like a bridegroom's always. He must always glory in the squadron's luck, and he loved us better than himself. That was why we loved him. They shook hands, and looked in each other's eyes. Ranjoor Singh wheeled his charger. And in that same second we all together saw three red lights swinging by the corner.

"*TIN!*" said we, with one voice. *Tin* means *three*, sahib; but it sounded rather like the scream of a shell leaving on its journey.

My horse laid his ears back and dug his toes into the ground. A trumpet sounded, and Colonel Kirby rose in his stirrups:

"Outram's Own!" he yelled, "By squadrons on Number One——"

But the sahib would not be interested in the sequence of commands; and who shall describe what followed? Who shall tell of a charge into the night, at an angle, into massed regiments of infantry advancing one behind another at the double and taken by surprise?

The guns of both sides suddenly ceased firing. Even as I used my spurs they ceased. How? Who am I that I should know? The British guns, I suppose, from fear of slaying us, and the German guns from fear of slaying Germans; but as to how, I know not. But the German star-shells continued bursting, and by that weird light their oncoming infantry saw charging into them men they had never seen before out of a picture-book!

God knows what tales they had been told about us Sikhs. I read their faces as I rode. Fear is an ugly weapon, sahib, whose hilt is more dangerous than its blade. If our officers had told us such tales about Germans as their officers had told them about us, I think perhaps we might have feared to charge.

Numbers were as nothing that night. Speed, and shock, and unexpectedness were ours, and lies had prepared us our reception. D Squadron rode behind Ranjoor Singh like a storm in the night—swung into line beside the other squadrons—and spurred forward as in a dream. There was no shouting; no war-cry. We rode into the Germans as I have seen wind cut into a forest in the hills—downward into them, for once we had leapt the trench the ground sloped their way. And they went down before us as we never had the chance of mowing them again.

So, sahib, we proved our hearts—whether they were stout, and true, as the British had believed, or false, as the Germans planned and hoped. That was a night of nights—one of very few such, for the mounted actions in this war have not been many. Hah! I have been envied! I have been called opprobrious names by a sergeant of British lancers, out of great jealousy! But that is the way of the British. It happened later, when the trench fighting had settled down in earnest and my regiment and his were waiting our turn behind the lines. He and I sat together on a bench in a great tent, where some French artists gave us good entertainment.

He offered me tobacco, which I do not use, and rum, which I do not drink. He accepted sweetmeats from me. And he called me a name that would make the sahib gulp, a word that I suppose he had picked up from a barrack-sweeper on the Bengal side of India. Then he slapped me on the back, and after that sat with his arm around me while the entertainment lasted. When we left the tent he swore roundly at a newcomer to the front for not saluting me, who am not entitled to salute. That is the way of the British. But I was speaking of Ranjoor Singh. Forgive me, sahib.

The horse his trooper-servant rode was blown and nearly useless, so that the trooper died that night for lack of a pair of heels, leaving us none to question as to Ranjoor Singh's late doings. But Bagh, Ranjoor Singh's charger, being a marvel of a beast, was fresh enough and Ranjoor Singh led us like a whirlwind beckoning a storm. I judged his heart was on fire. He led us slantwise into a tight-packed regiment. We rolled it over, and he took us beyond that into another one.

In the dark he reformed us—and few but he could have done that then—lined us up again with the other squadrons—and brought us back by the way we had come.

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Then he took us the same road a second time against remnants of the men who had withstood us and into yet another regiment that checked and balked. The Germans probably believed us ten times as many as we truly were, for that one set-back checked their advance along the whole line.

Colonel Kirby led us, but I never once saw him until we were back again resting our horses behind the trees while the roll was called. Throughout the fight—and I have no idea whatever how long it lasted—I kept an eye on Ranjoor Singh and spurred in his wake, obeying the least motion of his saber. No, sahib, I myself did not slay many men. It is the business of a non-commissioned man like me to help his officers keep control, and I did what I might. I was nearly killed by a wounded German officer who seized my bridle-rein; but a trooper's lance took him in the throat and I rode on untouched. For all I know that was the only danger I was in that night.

A battle is a strange thing, sahib—like a dream. A man only knows such part of it as crosses his own vision, and remembers but little of that. What he does remember seldom tallies with what the others saw. Talk with twenty of our regiment, and you may get twenty different versions of what took place—yet not one man would have lied to you, except perhaps here and there a little in the matter of his own accomplishment. Doubtless the Germans have a thousand different accounts of it.

I know this, and the world knows it; that night the Germans melted. They were. Then they broke into parties and were not. The star-shells ceased from bursting overhead, and out of black darkness Colonel Kirby's voice thundered an order. Then a trumpet blared. Then I heard Ranjoor Singh's voice, high-pitched. Almost the next I knew we were halted in the shadow of the trees again, calling low to one another, friend's voice seeking friend's. We could scarcely hear the voices for the thunder of artillery, that had begun again; and whereas formerly the German gunfire had been greatest, now we thought the British and French fire had the better of it. They had been reinforced, but I have no notion whence.

The infantry, that had drawn aside like a curtain to let us through, had closed in again to the edge of the forest, and through the noise of rifle-firing and artillery we caught presently the thunder of new regiments advancing at the double. Thousands of our Indian infantry—those who had been in the trains behind us—were coming forward at a run! God knows that was a night to make a man glad he had lived!

It was not only the Germans who had not expected us. Now, sahib, for the first time the British infantry began to understand who it was who had come to their aid, and they began to sing—one song, all together. The wounded sang it too, and the stretcher-bearers. There came a day when we had our own version of that song, but that night it was new to us. We only caught a few words—the first words. The sahib knows the words—the first few words? It was true we had come a long, long way; but it choked us into silence to hear that battered infantry acknowledge it.

Color and creed, sahib? What are color and creed? The world has mistaken us Sikhs too long for a breed it cannot understand. We Sikhs be men, with the hearts of men; and that night we knew that our hearts and theirs were one. Nor have I met since then the fire that could destroy the knowledge, although efforts have been made, and reasons shown me.

But my story is of Ranjoor Singh and what he did. Be attentive, sahib; this is a tale of tales!

CHAPTER II

Can the die fall which side up it will? Nay, not if it be honest.—*Eastern Proverb.*

MANY a league our infantry advanced that night, the guns following, getting the new range by a miracle each time they took new ground. We went forward too, at the cost of many casualties—too many in proportion to the work we did. We were fired on in the darkness more than once by our own infantry. We, who had lost but seventy-two men killed and wounded in the charge, were short another hundred when the day broke and nothing to the good by it.

Getting lost in the dark—falling into shell-holes—swooping down on rear-guards that generally proved to have machine guns with them—weary men on hungrier, wearier horses—the wonder is that a man rode back to tell of it at dawn.

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One-hundred-and-two-and-seventy were our casualties, and some two hundred horses —some of the men so lightly wounded that they were back in the ranks within the week. Some of us rode two to a horse. On our way to the rear we passed through reinforcements coming from another section of the front who gave us the right of way, and we took the salute of two divisions of French infantry who I suppose had been told of the service we had rendered. Said I to Gooja Singh, who sat my horse's rump, his own beast being disemboweled—

"Who speaks now of a poor beginning?"

"I would rather see the end!" said he.

But he never saw the end, although he went farther than was good.

He led the grumbling now—he who had been first to prophesy how we should be turned into infantry. They kept us at the rear, and took away our horses—took even our spurs, making us drill with unaccustomed weapons. And I think that the beginning of the new distrust of Ranjoor Singh was in resentment at his patience with the bayonet drill. We soldiers are like women, sahib, ever resentful of the new—aye, like women in more ways than one; for whom we have loved best we hate most when the change comes.

Once, at least a squadron of us had loved Ranjoor Singh to the death. He was a Sikh of Sikhs. It had been our boast that fire could not burn his courage nor love corrupt him, and I was still of that mind; but not so the others. They began to remember how he had stayed behind when we left India. We had all seen him in disguise, in conversation with that German by the Delhi gate. We knew how busy he had been in the bazaars while the rumors flew. And the trooper who had stayed behind with him, who had joined us with him at the very instant of the charge that night, died in the charge; so that there was none to give explanation of his conduct.

Ranjoor Singh himself was a very rock for silence. Our British officers said nothing, doubtless not suspecting the distrust; for it was a byword that Ranjoor Singh held the honor of the squadron in his hand. Yet of all the squadron only the officers and I now trusted him—the Sikh officers because they imitate the British; the British because faith is a habit with them once they have pledged it; and I—God knows. There were hours when I did distrust him—black hours, best forgotten.

The war settled down into a siege of trenches, and soon we were given a section of a trench to hold. Little by little we grew wise at the business of tossing explosives over blind banks—we, who would rather have been at it with the lance and saber. Yet, can a die fall which side up it will? Nay, not if it be honest! We were there to help. We who had carried coal could shovel mud, and as times went on we grumbled less.

But time hung heavy, and curiosity regarding Ranjoor Singh led us to ask Captain Fellowes; and he said Ranjoor Singh had stayed behind to expose a German plot—that having done so, he had hurried after us. That explanation ought to have satisfied every one, and I think it did for a time. But who could hide from such a man as Ranjoor Singh that the squadron's faith in him was gone?

How should we know that he had been forbidden to tell us what had kept him? When he set aside his pride and made us overtures, there was no response; so his heart hardened in him. Secrecy is good. Secrecy is better than all the lame explanations in the world. But in this war there has been too much secrecy in the wrong place. They should have let him line us up and tell us his whole story. But later, when perhaps he might have done it, either his pride was too great or his sense of obedience too tightly spun. To this day he has never told us. Not that it matters.

The subtlest fool is the worst, and Gooja Singh's tongue did not lack subtlety on occasion. He made it his business to remind the squadron daily of its doubts, and I, who should have known better, laughed at some of the things he said, and agreed with others. One is the fool who speaks with him who listens. I have never been rebuked for it by Ranjoor Singh, and more than once since that day he has seen fit to praise me; but in that hour when most he needed friends I became his half-friend which is worse than enemy. I never raised my voice in defense of him in those days.

Meanwhile Ranjoor Singh grew very wise at this trench warfare, Colonel Kirby and the other British officers taking great comfort in his cunning. It was he who led us to tie strings to the German wire entanglements, which we then jerked from

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our trench, causing them to lie awake and waste much ammunition. It was he who thought of dressing turbans on the end of poles and thrusting them forward at the hour before dawn when fear and chill and darkness have done their worst work. That started a panic that cost the Germans eighty men.

I think his leadership would have won the squadron back to love him. I know it saved his life. We had all heard tales of how the British soldiers in South Africa made short work of the officers they did not love, and it would have been easy to make an end of Ranjoor Singh on any dark night. But he led too well; men were afraid to take the responsibility lest the others turn on them. One night I overheard two troopers considering, and they suspected I had overheard. I said nothing, but they were afraid, as I knew they would be. Has the sahib ever heard of "left-hand casualties?" I will explain.

We Sikhs have a saying, that in fear there is no wisdom. None can be wise and afraid. None can be afraid and wise. The men at the front, both Indian and British —French too for ought I know—who feared to fight longer in the trenches were seized in those early days with the foolish thought of inflicting some injury on themselves—not very severe, but enough to cause a spell of absence at the base and a rest in hospital. Folly being the substance of that idea, and most men being right-handed, such self-inflicted wounds were practically always in the hand or foot and always on the left side. The ambulance men knew them on the instant.

Those two fools of my squadron wounded themselves with bullets in the left hand, forgetting that their palms would be burned by the discharge. I was sent to the rear to give evidence against them—for I saw them commit the foolishness. The cross-examination we all three underwent was clever—at the hands of a young British captain, who I dare swear was suckled by a Sikh nurse in the Punjab. In less than thirty minutes he had the whole story out of us; and the two troopers were shot that evening for an example.

That young captain was greatly impressed with the story we had told about Ranjoor Singh, and he called me back afterward and asked me a hundred questions more—until he must have known the very color of my entrails and I knew not which way I faced. To all of this a senior officer of the Intelligence Department listened with both ears, and presently he and the captain talked together.

The long and short of that was that Ranjoor Singh was sent for; and when he returned to the trench after two days' absence it was to work independently of us—from our trench, but irrespective of our doings. Even Colonel Kirby now had no orders to give him, although they two talked at frequent intervals in the place Colonel Kirby called his funk-hole. It was now that the squadron's reawakening love for Ranjoor Singh received the worst check of any. We had almost forgotten he knew German. Henceforward he conversed in German each day with the enemy.

It is a strange thing, sahib—not easy to explain—but I, who have achieved some fluency in English and might therefore have admired his gift of tongues, now began to doubt him in earnest—hating myself the while, but doubting him. And Gooja Singh, who had talked the most and dropped the blackest hints against him, now began to take his side.

And Ranjoor Singh said nothing. Night after night he went to lie at the point where our trench and the enemy's lay closest. There he would talk with some one whom we never saw, while we sat shivering in the mud. Cold we can endure, sahib, as readily as any; it is colder in Winter where I come from than anything I felt in Flanders; but the rain and the mud depressed our spirits, until with these two eyes I have seen grown men weeping.

THEY kept us at work to encourage us. Our spells in the trench were shortened and our rests at the rear increased to the utmost possible. Only Ranjoor Singh took no vacation, remaining ever on the watch, passing from one trench to another one, conversing ever with the enemy.

We dug and they dug, each side laboring everlastingly to find the other's listening places and to blow them up, so that the earth became a very rat-run. Above ground, where was only ruin and barbed wire, there was no sign of activity, but only a great stench that came from bodies none dared bury. We were thankful that the wind blew oftenest from us to them;

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but whichever way the wind blew Ranjoor Singh knew no rest. He was ever to be found where the lines lay closest, either listening or talking. We understood very well that he was carrying out orders given him at the rear, but that did not make the troopers like him any better. I was one with them; I hated to see a squadron leader stoop to such intrigues.

It was plain that intrigue was making headway, for the Germans soon began to toss into our trench bundles of printed pamphlets, explaining in our tongue why they were our best friends and we should refuse to wage war on them. They threw printed bulletins that said, in good Punjabi, there was revolution from end to end of India, rioting in England, utter disaster to the British fleet, and that our way home to India had been cut by German warships. They must have been ignorant of the fact that we recieved our mail from India regularly. I have noticed this about the Germans: they are unable to convince themselves that any other people can appreciate the same things they appreciate, think as swiftly as they, or despise the terrors they depise. That is one reason why they must lose this war.

One afternoon, when I was pretending to doze in a niche near the entrance to Colonel Kirby's funk-hole, I became possessed of the key to it all; for Colonel Kirby's voice was raised in anger. I understood at last how Ranjoor Singh had orders to deceive the Germans as to our state of mind. He was to make them believe we were growing mutinous and that the leaven only needed time in which to work; this of course for the purpose of throwing them off their guard.

My heart stopped beating while I listened, for what man hears his honor smirched without wincing? Even so I think I would have held my tongue, only that Gooja Singh, who dozed in a niche on the other side of the funk-hole entrance, heard the same as I.

Said Gooja Singh that evening to the troopers round about:

"They chose well," said he. "They picked a brave man—a clever man, for a desperate venture!"

And when the troopers asked what that might mean he asked how many of them in the Punjab had seen a goat tied to a stake to lure a panther. The suggestion made them think. Then, pretending to praise him, letting fall no word that could be thrown back in his teeth, he condemned Ranjoor Singh for a worse traitor than any had yet believed him. Gooja Singh was a man with a certain subtlety. A man with two tongues. Very dangerous.

"Ranjoor Singh is brave," said he, "for he is not afraid to sacrifice us all. Many officers are afraid to lose too many men in the gaining of an end, but not so he. He is clever, for who else would have thought of making us seem despicable to the Germans in order to tempt an attack? Have ye not noticed how to our rear all is being made ready for the defense and for counter attack to follow? We are the bait. The battle is to be waged over our dead bodies."

I corrected him. I said I had heard as well as he, and that Colonel Kirby was utterly angry at the defamation of those whom he was ever pleased to call "his Sikhs." But that convinced nobody, although it did the colonel sahib no harm in the regiment's opinion—not that he needed advocates. We were all ready to die around Colonel Kirby at any minute. Even Gooja Singh was ready to do that.

"Does the colonel sahib accept the situation?" one of the troopers asked.

"Aye, for he must," said Gooja Singh and I could not deny it. "Ranjoor Singh went over his head and orders have come from the rear."

I could not deny that either, although I did not believe it. How should I, or any one know what passed after Ranjoor Singh had been sent for by the Intelligence officers? I was his half-friend in those days sahib. Worse than his enemy—unwilling to take part against him, yet unready to speak up in his defense. Doubtless my silence went for consent among the rest.

The end of the discussion found men unafraid.

"If the colonel sahib is willing to be bait," said they, "then so be we, but let us see that none hang back!"

And so the whole regiment made up its mind to die desperately, yet with many a sidewise glance at Ranjoor Singh, who was watched more carefully than I think he guessed. If he had tried to slip back to the rear it would have been the end of him. But he continued with us.

And all this while a great force gathered at our rear—gathered and grew—India

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and British infantry. Guns by the fifty were brought forward under cover of the night and placed in line behind us. Ranjoor Singh continued talking with the enemy, lying belly downward in the mud, and they kept throwing printed stuff to us that we turned in to our officers.

Then one evening, just after dusk, we were all amazed by the news that the assault was to come from our side. And almost before that news had reached us the guns at our rear began their overture, making preparation beyond the compass of a man's mind to grasp or to convey. They hurled such a torrent of shells that the Germans could neither move away the troops in front of us nor bring up others to their aid. It did not seem possible that one German could be left alive, and I even felt jealous because, thought I, no work would be left for us to do! Yet men did live—as we discovered. For a night and a day our ordnance kept up that preparation, and then word went 'round.

Who shall tell of a night attack, from a trench against trenches? Suddenly the guns ceased pounding the earth in front of us and lifted to make a screen of fire almost a mile beyond. There was instant pitch darkness on every hand, and out of that a hundred trumpets sounded. Instantly, each squadron leader leaped the earthwork, shouting to his men. Ranjoor Singh leaped up in front of us, and we followed him, all forgetting their distrust of him in the fierce excitement—remembering only how he had led us in the charge on that first night. The air was thick with din, and fumes, and flying metal—for the Germans were not forgetting to use artillery. I ceased to think of anything but going forward. Who shall describe it?

Once in Bombay I heard a Christian preacher tell of the Judgment Day to come, when graves shall give up their dead. That is not our Sikh idea of judgment, but his words brought before my mind a picture not so much unlike a night attack in Flanders. He spoke of the whole earth trembling and consumed by fire—of thunder and lightning and a great, long trumpet-call—of the dead leaping alive from the graves where they lay buried. Not a poor picture, sahib, of a night attack in Flanders!

The first line of German trenches, and the second had been pounded out of being by our guns. The barbed wire had been cut into fragments by our shrapnel. Here and there an arm or a leg protruded from the ground—here and there a head. For two hundred yards and perhaps more there was nothing to oppose us, except the enemy shells bursting so constantly that we seemed to breathe splintered metal. Yet very few were hit. The din was so great that it seemed to be silence. We were phantom men, going forward without sound of footfall. I could neither feel nor think for the first two hundred yards, but ran with my bayonet out in front of me. And then I did feel. A German bayonet barked my knuckles. After that there was fighting such as I hope never to know again.

The Germans did not seem to have been taken by surprise at all. They had made ample preparation. And as for holding us in contempt, they gave no evidence of that. Their wounded were unwilling to surrender because their officers had given out we would torture prisoners. We had to pounce on them, and cut their buttons off and slit their boots, so that they must use both hands to hold their trousers up and could not run. And that took time so that we lagged behind a little, for we took more prionsers than the regiments to right and left of us. The Dogra regiment to our left and the Gurkha regiment to our right gained on us fast, and we became as it were the center of a new moon.

But then in the light of bursting shells we saw Colonel Kirby and Ranjoor Singh and Captain Fellowes and some other officers far out in front of us beckoning—calling on us for our greatest effort. We answered. We swept forward after them into the teeth of all the inventions in the world. Mine after mine exploded under our very feet. Shrapnel burst among us. There began to be uncut wire, and men rushed out at us from trenches that we thought obliterated, but that proved only to have been hidden under débris by our gunfire. Shadows resolved into trenches defended by machine guns.

But we went forward—cavalry, without a spur among us—cavalry with rifles—cavalry on foot—infantry with the fire and the drill and the thoughts of cavalry—still cavalry at heart, for all the weapons they had given us and the trench life we had lived. We remembered, sahib, that the Germans had been educated lately to despise us, and we were out that night to

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convert them to a different opinion! It seemed good to D Squadron that Ranjoor Singh, who had done the defamation, should lead us to the clearing of our name. Nothing could stop us that night.

Whereas we had been last in the advance, we charged into the lead and held it. We swept on I know not how far, but very far beyond the wings. No means had been devised that I know of for checking the distance covered, and I suppose headquarters timed the attack and tried to judge how far the advance had carried, with the aid of messengers sent running back. No easy task!

At all events we lost touch with the regiments to right and left, but kept touch with the enemy, pressing forward until suddenly our own shellfire ceased to fall in front of us but resumed pounding toward our rear. They call such fire a barrage, sahib. Its purpose is to prevent the enemy from making a counter-attack until the infantry can dig themselves in and secure the new ground won. That meant we were isolated. It needed no staff officer to tell us that, or to bring us to our senses. We were like men who wake from a nightmare, to find the truth more dreadful than the dream.

COLONEL KIRBY was wounded a little, and sat while a rissaldar bound his arm. Ranjoor Singh found a short trench half full of water, and ordered us into it. Although we had not realized it until then, it was raining torrents, and the Germans we drove out of that trench—there were but a few of them—were wetter than water rats; but we had to scramble down into it, and the cold bath finished what the sense of isolation had begun. We were sober men when Kirby sahib scrambled in last and ordered us to begin on the trench at once with picks and shovels that the Germans had left behind. We altered the trench so that it faced both ways, and waited shivering for the dawn.

Let it not be supposed however, sahib, that we waited unmolested. The Germans are not that kind of warrior. I hold no brief for them, but I tell no lies about them either. They fight with persistence, bravery, and what they consider to be cunning. We were under rifle fire at once from before and behind and the flanks, and our own artillery began pounding the ground so close to us that fragments of shell and shrapnel flew over our heads incessantly, and great clods of earth came thumping into our trench, compelling us to keep busy with the shovels.

Nor did the German artillery omit to make a target of us, though with poor success. More than the half of us lived; and to prove that there had been thought as well as bravery that night we had plenty of ammunition with us. We were troubled to stow the ammunition out of the wet, yet where it would be safe from the firing.

We made no reply to the shellfire, for that would have been foolishness; so, doubtless thinking they had the range not quite right, or perhaps supposing we had been annihilated, the enemy discontinued shelling us and devoted their attention to our friends beyond. But at the same time a battalion of infantry began to feel its way toward us and we grew very busy with our rifles, the wounded crawling through the wet to pass the cartridges. Once there was a bayonet charge, which we repelled.

Those who had not thrown away their haversacks to lighten themselves had their emergency rations, but about half of us had nothing to eat whatever. It was perfectly evident from the very first that unless we should receive prompt aid at dawn our case was as hopeless as death itself. So much the more reason for stout hearts, said we, and our bearing put new heart into our officers.

When dawn came the sight was not inspiriting. Dawn amid a waste of Flanders mud, seen through a rainstorm, is not a joyous spectacle in any case. Consider, sahib, what a sunny land we came from, and pass no hasty judgment on us if our spirits sank. It was the weather, not the danger that depressed us. I, who was near the center of the trench, could see to right and left over the ends, and I made a hasty count of heads, discovering that we, who had been a regiment, were now about three hundred men, forty of whom were wounded.

I saw that we were many a hundred yards away from the nearest British trench. The Germans had crept under cover of the darkness and dug themselves in anew between us and our friends. Before us was a trench full of infantry, and there were others to right and left. We were completely surrounded; and it was not an hour after dawn when the enemy began to shout

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to us to show our hands and surrender. Colonel Kirby forbade us to answer, and we lay still as dead men until they threw bombs—which we answered with bullets.

After that we were left alone for an hour or two, and Colonel Kirby whose wound was not serious, began passing along the trench, knee-deep in the muddy water, to inspect us and count us and give each man encouragement. As he passed close to me a hand-grenade struck him in the thigh and exploded. He fell forward on me, and I took him across my knees lest he fall into the water and be smothered. That is how it happened that only I overheard what he said to Ranjoor Singh before he died.

Several others tried to hear, for we loved Colonel Kirby as sons love their father; but, since he lay with his head on my shoulder, my ear was as close to his lips as Ranjoor Singh's to whom he spoke, so that Ranjoor Singh and I heard and the rest did not. Later I told the others, but they chose to disbelieve me.

Ranjoor Singh came wading along the trench, stumbling over men's feet in his hurry and nearly falling just as he reached us, so that for the moment I thought he too had been shot. Besides Colonel Kirby, who was dying in my arms, he, and Captain Fellowes, and one other rissaldar were our only remaining officers. Colonel Kirby was in great pain, so that his words were not in his usual voice but forced through clenched teeth, and Major Singh had to stoop to listen.

"Shepherd 'em!" said Colonel Kirby. "Shepherd 'em, Ranjoor Singh!" My ear was close and I heard each word. "A bad business. They did not know enough to listen to you at headquarters. Don't waste time blaming anybody. Pray for wisdom, and fear nothing! You're in command now. I give 'em to you. Take over. Shepherd 'em! Good-by, old friend!"

"Good-by, Colonel sahib," said Ranjoor Singh, and Kirby sahib died in that moment, having shed the half of his blood over me.

Ranjoor Singh and I had laid him along a ledge above the water and it was not very long before a chance shell dropped near and buried him under a ton of earth. Yes, sahib, a British shell.

Presently Ranjoor Singh waded along the trench to have word with Captain Fellowes, who was wounded rather badly. I made busy with the men about me, making them stand where they could see best with least risk of exposure, and ordering spade work here and there. It is a strange thing, sahib, but I have never seen it otherwise, that spade work—which is surely the most important thing—is the last thing troopers will attend to unless compelled. They will comb their beards, and decorate the trench with colored stones and draw names in the mud, but the all-important digging waits. Sikh and Gurkha and British and French are all alike in that respect.

When Ranjoor Singh came back from his talk with Captain Fellowes he sent me to the right wing under our other rissaldar, and after he was killed by a grenade I was in command of the right wing of the trench.

The three days that followed have mostly gone from memory, that being the way of evil. If men could remember pain and misery they would refuse to live because of the risk of more of it; but hope springs ever anew out of wretchedness like sprouts on the burned land, and the ashes are forgotten. I do not remember much of those three days.

There was nothing to eat. There began to be a smell. There was worse than nothing to drink, for thirst took hold of us, yet the water in the trench was all pollution. The smell made us wish to vomit, yet what could the empty do but desire? Corpses lay all around us. No, sahib, not the dead of the night before's fighting. Have I not said that the weather was cold? The bombardment by our own guns preceding our attack had torn up graves that were I know not how old. When we essayed to re-bury some bodies the Germans drove us back under cover.

That night, and the next, several attempts were made to rush us, but under Ranjoor Singh's command we beat them off. He was wakeful as the stars and as unexcited. Obedience to him was so comforting that men forgot for the time their suspicion and distrust. When dawn came there were more dead bodies round about, and some wounded who called piteously for help. The Germans crawled out to help their wounded, but Ranjoor Singh bade us drive them back and we obeyed.

Then the Germans began shouting, and Ranjoor Singh answered. If he had answered in English, so that most of us could have understood, all would surely have

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been well; I am certain that in that case the affection, returning because of his fine leadership, would have destroyed the memory of suspicion. But I suppose it had become habit with him to talk to the enemy in German by that time, and as the words we could not understand passed back and forth even I began to hate him. Yet he drove a good bargain for us.

Instead of hand-grenades the Germans began to throw bread—flat, army loaves, Ranjoor Singh counting aloud as each loaf came over, we catching with great anxiety lest they fall into the water and be polluted. It took a long time, but when there was a good dry loaf for each man Ranjoor Singh gave the Germans leave to come and carry in their wounded, and bade us hold our fire. Gooja Singh was for playing a trick, but the troopers near him murmured and Ranjoor Singh threatened him with death if he dared. He never forgot that.

The Germans who came to fetch the wounded laughed at us but Ranjoor Singh forbade us to answer, and Captain Fellowes backed him up.

"There will be another attack from our side presently," said Captain Fellowes, "and our friends will answer for us."

I shuddered at that. I remembered the bombardment that preceded our first advance. Better die at the hands of the enemy, thought I. But I said nothing. Presently a new thought came to me, and I called to Ranjoor Singh along the trench.

"You should have made a better bargain," said I. "You should have compelled them to care for our wounded before they were allowed to take their own!"

"I demanded, but they refused," he answered, and then I wished I had bitten out my tongue rather than speak, for although I believed his answer, the rest of the men did not. There began to be new murmuring against him, led by Gooja Singh; but Gooja Singh was too subtle to be convicted of the responsibility.

Captain Fellowes grew aware of the murmuring and made much show thenceforward of his faith in Ranjoor Singh. He was weak from his wound and was attended constantly by two men, so that although he kept command of the left wing and did ably, he could not shout loud enough to be heard very far, and he had to send messages to Ranjoor Singh from mouth to mouth.

His evident approval had somewhat the effect of subduing the men's resentment, although not much, and when he died that night there was none left, save I, to lend our leader countenance. And I was only his half-friend, without enough merit in my heart truly to be the right-hand man I was by seniority. I was willing enough to die at his back, but not to share contempt with him.

A DAY passed and there came another day, when the bread was done, and there were no more German wounded spraddled in the mud over whom to strike new bargains. It had ceased raining, so we could catch no rain to drink. We were growing weak from weariness and want of sleep, and we demanded of Ranjoor Singh that he lead us back toward the British lines.

"We should perish on the way," said he.

"What of it?" we answered, I with the rest. "Better that than this vulture's death in a graveyard!"

But he shook his head and ordered us to try to think like men.

"The life of a Sikh," said he, "and the oath of a Sikh are one. We swore to serve our friends. To try to cut our way back would be but to die for our own comfort."

"You should have led us back that first night, when the attack was spent," said Gooja Singh.

"I was not in command that first night," Ranjoor Singh answered him, and who could gainsay that?

At irregular intervals British shells began bursting near us, and we all knew what they were. The batteries were feeling for the range. They would begin a new bombardment. Now, therefore, is the end, said we. But Ranjoor Singh stood up with his head above the trench and began shouting to the Germans. They answered him. Then, to our utter astonishment, he tore the shirt from a dead man, tied it to a rifle, and held it up.

The Germans cheered and laughed, but we made never a sound. We were bewildered—sick from the stink, and weariness, and thirst, and lack of food. Yet I swear to you, sahib, on my honor that it had not entered into the heart of one of us to surrender. That we who had been first of the Indian contingent to board a ship, first to land in France, first to engage the enemy, should now be first to surrender in a body

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seemed to us very much worse than death. Yet Ranjoor Singh bade us leave our rifles and climb out of the trench, and we obeyed him. God knows why we obeyed him. I, who had been half-hearted hitherto, hated him in that minute as a trapped wolf hates the hunter; yet I, too, obeyed.

We left our dead for the Germans to bury, but we dragged the wounded out and some of them died as we lifted them. When we reached the German trench and they counted us, including Ranjoor Singh and three-and-forty wounded there were two hundred and three-and-fifty of us left alive.

They led Ranjoor Singh apart. He had neither rifle nor saber in his hand, and he walked to their trench alone because we avoided him. He was more muddy than we, and as ragged and tired. He had stood in the same foul water, and smelt the same stench. He was hungry as we. He had been willing to surrender, and we had not. Yet he walked like an officer, and looked like one, and we looked like animals. And we knew it, and he knew it. And the Germans recognized the facts.

He acted like a crowned king when he reached the trench. A German officer spoke with him earnestly, but he shook his head and then they led him away. When he was gone the same officer came and spoke to us in English, and I understanding him at once, he bade me tell the others that the British witnessed our surrender.

"See," said he, "what a bombardment they have begun again. That is in the hope of slaying you. That is out of revenge because you dared surrender instead of dying like rats in a ditch to feed their pride!"

It was true that a bombardment had begun again. It had begun that minute. Those truly had been ranging shells. If we had stayed five minutes longer before surrendering we should have been blown to pieces; but we were in no mood to care on that account.

The Germans are a simple folk, sahib, although they themselves think otherwise. When they think they are the subtlest they are easiest to understand. Understanding was reborn in my heart on account of that German's words. Thought I, if Ranjoor Singh were in truth a traitor then he would have leaped at a chance to justify himself to us. He would have repeated what that German urged him to tell us. Yet I saw him refuse.

As they hurried him away, pity for him came over me like warm rain on the parched earth, and when a man can pity he can reason. I spoke in Punjabi to the others and the German officer thought I was translating what he had told me to say; yet in truth I reminded them that no man can find a place where God is not, and where God is, is courage. I was senior now, and my business was to encourage them. They took new heart from my words, all except Gooja Singh, who wept, and the German officer was pleased with what he mistook for the effect of his speech.

"Tell them they shall be excellently treated," said he, seizing my elbow. "When we shall have won this war the British will no longer be able to force natives of India to fight their battles for them."

I judged it well to repeat that word for word. There are ever ten applicants for every vacancy in such a regiment as ours, and until Ranjoor Singh ordered our surrender we were all free men—free givers of our best; whereas the Germans about us were all conscripts. The comparison did no harm.

We saw no more of our wounded until some of them were returned to us healed, weeks later; but from them we learned that their treatment had been good. With us, however, it was not so, in spite of the promise. We were hustled along a wide trench, and taken over by another guard who kicked us without excuse. As we went, the trenches were under fire all the time from the British artillery. The guard swore it was our surrender that had drawn the fire, and belabored us on that account.

At the rear of the German lines we were herded in a quarry lest we observe too much, and it was not until after dark that we were given half a loaf of bread apiece. Then, without time to eat that which had been given us, we were driven off into the darkness. First, however, they took our goatskin overcoats away, saying they were too good to be worn by savages. A non-commissioned officer who could speak good English was sent to explain that point to us.

After an hour's march through the dark we were herded into cattle-trucks in a siding behind some trees. The trucks did not smell of cattle, but of foul garments and unwashed men. Two armed German infantrymen were locked into each truck with us, and the pair in the truck in which

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I was, drove us in a crowd to the farther end, claiming an entire half for themselves. It was true that we stank, for we had been many days and nights without opportunity to get clean; yet they offered us no means of washing. I have seen German prisoners allowed to wash before they had been ten minutes behind the British lines.

We were five days in that train, sahib—five days and nights. Our guards were fed at regular intervals, but not we. Once or twice a day they brought us a bucket of water from which we were bidden drink in a great hurry while the train waited; yet often the train waited hours in sidings and no water at all was brought us. For food we were chiefly dependent on the charity of people at the wayside stations who came with gifts intended for German wounded; some of those took pity on us.

At last, sahib, when we were cold and stiff and miserable to the very verge of death, we came to a little place called Oschersleben, and there the cruelty came to an unexpected end. We were ordered out of the trucks and met on the platform by a German, not in uniform, who showed distress at our predicament and who hastened to assure us in our own tongue that henceforward there would be amends made.

If that man had taken charge of us in the beginning we might not have been suspicious of him, for he seemed gentle and his words were fair; but now his kindness came too late to have effect. Animals can sometimes be rendered tame by starvation and brutality followed by plenty and kindness, but not men, and particularly not Sikhs—it being no part of our Guru's teaching that either full belly or tutored intellect can compensate for lack of goodness. Neither is it his teaching, on the other hand, that a man must wear thoughts on his face; so we did not reject this man's advances.

Carts drawn by oxen stood near the station, and into those we were crowded and driven to a camp on the outskirts of the town. There comfortable wooden huts were ready, well warmed and clean—and a hot meal—and much hot water in which we were allowed to bathe.

Doctors examined us. New clothes were given us—German khaki uniforms and cotton cloth for turbans. Nothing was left undone to make us feel well received, except that a barbed-wire fence was all about and armed guards marched outside.

Being senior surviving non-commissioned officer I was put in charge of the camp in a certain manner, and for about a week we did nothing but rest and eat and keep the camp tidy. All day long women and children came to stare through the fence, but no insults were offered us. Rather the women showed us kindness and passed us sweetmeats and strange food through the fence, until an officer came and stopped them with overbearing words.

A WEEK had gone and we were feeling better, standing about and looking at the freshly fallen snow, when new developments commenced unfolding.

Telegrams translated into Punjabi were nailed to the door of a hut, telling of India in rebellion and of men, women and children butchered by the British in cold blood. Other telegrams stated that the Sikhs in particular had risen, and that Pertab Singh, our prince, had been hanged in public. Many other lies they posted up. It would be waste of time to tell them all. They were foolishness—such foolishness as might deceive the German public, but not us who had received our mail from home within a day or two of our surrender.

Men came who knew our tongue, and talked with us. The argument was bluntly put to us that we ought to let expediency be our guide in all things. Yet we were expected to trust the men who gave us such advice!

Our sense of justice was not courted once. They made appeal to our bellies—to our purses—to our lust—to our fear—but to our righteousness not at all. They made for us great pictures of what German rule of the world would be, and at last began to speak of Ranjoor Singh.

They told us he was being very useful to them, in Berlin, in daily conference with the German General Staff, explaining matters that pertained to the intended invasion of India. Doubtless they thought that news would please us greatly. But, having heard so many lies already I set that down for another one; and the others became all the more determined in their loyalty from sheer disgust at Ranjoor Singh's unfaithfulness. They believed and I disbelieved, yet the result was one.

By day there was the camp to keep clear and the German officers to talk to; but at

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night we lay awake thinking of India, and of our dead officer sahibs, and of all that had been told us that we knew were lies. Ever the conversation turned to Ranjoor Singh at last, and night after night the anger grew against him. I myself admitted very often that his duty had been to lead us to our death. I was as ashamed as the rest of our surrender.

They told us the German army was outside Paris and that the whole of the British North Sea Fleet was either sunk or captured. They also said that the Turks in Gallipoli had won great victories against the Allies. We began to wonder why such conquerors should seek so earnestly the friendship of a handful of us Sikhs. Our wounded had been well primed and their stories made us think, but not as the Germans would have had us think.

Week after week until the Spring came, we listened by day and talked among ourselves at night; and the more they assured us Ranjoor Singh was working with them in Berlin the more we prayed for opportunity to prove our hearts. Spring dragged along toward Summer and there began to be prayers for vengeance on him. I said less than any. It seemed to me that if Ranjoor Singh was really playing traitor then he was going a tedious way about it. Yet it was equally clear that if I should dare to say one word in his behalf, that would be to pass sentence on myself. I kept silence when I could, and was evasive when they pressed me, cowardice struggling with new conviction in my heart.

There came one night at last, when men's hearts burned in them too terribly for sleep, that some one sent the word whispering from hut to hut, that we should ask for Ranjoor Singh to be brought to us. Let the excuse be that he ought to advise us and we would do faithfully whatever Ranjoor Singh should order. Then, when he should have been brought to us, should he talk treason we would tear him in pieces with our hands. That resolution was agreed to. It was I who asked next day that Ranjoor Singh be brought.

We talked of our plan at night. We repeated it at dawn. We whispered it above the bread at breakfast. After breakfast we stood in groups, confirming our decision with great oaths and binding one another to fulfilment—I no less than all the others. Like the others I was blinded now by the sense of our high purpose and I forgot to consider what might happen should Ranjoor Singh take any other line than that expected of him.

I think it was eleven in the morning of the fourth day after our decision that there was some small commotion at the entrance gate and a man walked through alone. The gate slammed shut again behind him.

He strode forward to the middle of our compound, stood still, and confronted us. We stared at him. We gathered 'round him. We said nothing.

"Fall in, two deep!" commanded he. And we fell in, two deep, just as he ordered.

" 'Ten-shun!" commanded he. And we stood to attention.

Sahib, he was Ranjoor Singh!

He stood within easy reach of the nearest man, clothed in a new khaki German uniform. He wore a German saber at his side. Yet I swear to you the saber was not the reason why no man struck at him. Nor were there Germans near enough to have rescued him. We, whose oath to murder him still trembled on our lips, stood and faced him with trembling knees now that he had come at last.

We stood before him like two rows of dumb men, gazing at his face. It dawned on us as we stared that we did not understand, but that he did; and there is no murder in that mood.

Before we could gather our wits he began to speak to us, and we listened as in the old days when at least a squadron of us had loved him to the very death. A very unexpected word was the first he used.

"Simpletons!" said he.

Sahib, simpletons was the last thing we had thought ourselves. On the contrary we thought ourselves astute to have judged his character and to have kept our minds uncorrupted by the German efforts. Yet we were no longer so sure that any man was ready with an answer.

He glanced over his shoulder to left and right. There were no Germans inside the fence; none near enough to overhear him, even if he raised his voice. So he did raise it, and we all heard.

"I come from Berlin!" said he.

"Ah!" said we—as one man. For another minute he stood eying us, waiting to see whether any man would speak.

"We be honest men!" said a trooper who

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stood not far from me, and several others murmured.

"He has not come for nothing," said I. "Let us listen first and pass judgment afterward."

"We have heard enough treachery!" said the trooper who had spoken first, but the others growled him down and presently there was silence.

"You have eyes," said Ranjoor Singh, "and ears, and nose, and lips for nothing at all but treachery!" He spoke very slowly, sahib. "You have listened, and smelled for it, and have spoken of nothing else, and what you have sought you think you have found! To argue with men in the dark is like gathering wind into baskets. My business is to lead, and I will lead. Your business is to follow, and you shall follow." Then, "Simpletons!" said he again; and having said that he was silent.

No man answered him. I can not speak for the others, although there was a wondrous maze of lies put forth that night by way of explanation that I might repeat. All I know is that through my mind kept running against my will self-accusation, self-condemnation, self-contempt! I remembered that for more than twenty years he had stood to all of us for an example of what Sikh honor truly is, and that he had been aware of it. Yet on how meager evidence had we condemned him.

"I know the thoughts ye think!" said he, beginning again when he had given us time to answer and none had dared. "I will give you a real thought to put in the place of all that foolishness. This is a regiment. I am its last surviving officer. Yet, if ye are weary of being a regiment, behold—I am as near you as a man's throat to his hand! Have no fear"—that was a bitter thrust, sahib!—"this is a German saber; I will use no German steel on any of you. I will not strike back if any seek to kill me."

There was no answer, sahib. If he had coaxed us with specious arguments, as surely a liar would have done, that would probably have been his last speech in the world. But there was not one word that suggested argument.

"I have been made a certain offer in Berlin," said he, after another long pause. "First it was made to me alone, and I would not accept it. I and my regiment, said I, are one. So the offer was repeated to me as the leader of this regiment. Thus they admitted I am rightful leader of it, and the outcome of that shall be on their heads. As major of this regiment I accepted the offer, and as its major I now command your obedience."

"Obedience to whom?" asked I, speaking again as it were against my will, and frightened by my own voice.

"To me," said he.

"Not to the Germans?" I asked. He wore a German uniform, and so for that matter did we all.

"To me," he said again, and he took one step aside that he might see my face better. "You, Hira Singh, you heard Colonel Kirby make over the command!"

Every man in the regiment knew that Colonel Kirby had died across my knees. They looked from Ranjoor Singh to me, and from me to Ranjoor Singh, and I felt my heart grow first faint from dread of their suspicion, and then bold, then proud that I should be judged fit to stand beside him. Then came shame again, for I knew I was not fit.

"If I told you my plan," said he presently, when he had cleared his throat, "you would tear it in little pieces. The Germans have another plan, and they will tell you as much of it as they think it good for you to know. Mark well my orders. Listen to this plan of theirs. Pretend to agree. Then you shall be given weapons. Then you shall leave this camp within a week."

That, sahib, was like a shell bursting in the midst of men asleep. What did it mean? Eyes glanced to left and right, looking for understanding and finding none, and no man spoke because none could think of anything to say. It was on my tongue to ask him to explain, when he gave us his final word on the matter—and little enough it was, yet sufficient if we obeyed.

"Remember the oath of a Sikh!" said he. "Remember that he who is true in his heart has Truth to fight for him! Treachery begets treason, and treason begets confusion; and who are ye to stay the course of things? Faith begets faith, and courage gives birth to opportunity!"

He paused, but we knew he had not finished yet, and ke kept us waiting full three minutes wondering what would come. Then:

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"As for your doubts," said he. "If the head aches, shall the body cut it off that it may think more clearly? Consider that!" said he. "Dismiss!"

We fell out and he marched away like a king with thoughts of state in mind. And oh, sahib, he strode as an arrow goes, swift and straight, and splendid. Lonely as an arrow that has left the sheaf!

I had to run to catch up with him, and I was out of breath when I touched his sleeve. He turned and waited while I thought of things to say, and then struggled to find words with which to say them.

"Sahib!" said I. "Oh, Major sahib!" And then my throat became full of words each struggling to be first, and I was silent.

"Well?" said he, standing with both arms folded, looking very grave, but not angry nor contemptuous.

"Sahib," I said, "I am a true man. As I stand here I am a true man. I have been a fool—I have been half-hearted—I was like a man in the dark; I listened and heard voices that deceived me!"

"And am I to listen and hear voices too?" he asked.

"Nay, sahib!" I said. "Not such voices, but true words!"

"Words?" he said. "Words! Words! There have already been too many words. Truth needs no words to prove it true, Hira Singh. Words are the voice of nothingness!"

"Then, sahib—" said I, stammering.

"Hira Singh," said he, "each man's heart is his own. Let each man keep his own. And when the time comes we shall see what we shall see. But we shall see no true men eating shame," said he.

And with that he acknowledged my salute, and turned on his heel, and marched away. And the great gate slammed behind him. And German officers pressing close on either side talked with him earnestly, asking, as plainly as if I had heard the words, what he had said, and what we had said, and what the outcome was to be. I could see his lips move as he answered, but no man living could have guessed what he told them. I never did know what he told them. But I have lived to see the fruit of what he did, and of what he made us do; and from that minute I have never faltered for a second in my faithfulness to him. Be attentive, sahib, and learn what a man of men is Ranjoor Singh Bahadur.

CHAPTER III

Shall he who knows not false from true judge treason?—*Eastern Proverb.*

YOU may well imagine, sahib, in the huts that night there was noise. Men flitted like ghosts from hut to hut—not too openly, nor without sufficient evidence of stealth to keep the guards in good conceit of themselves, but freely for all that. What the men of one hut said, the men of the next hut knew within five minutes, and so on, back and forth.

I was careful to say nothing. When men questioned me:

"Nay," said I. "I am one and ye are many. Could I lead you against your wills?"

They murmured at that, but silence is easier to keep than some men think.

Why did I say nothing? In the first place, sahib, because my mind was made at last. With all my heart now, with the oath of a Sikh and the truth of a Sikh I was Ranjoor Singh's man. I believed him true, and I was ready to stand or fall by that belief, in the dark, in the teeth of death, against all odds, anywhere. Therefore there was nothing I could say with wisdom. For if they were to suspect my true thoughts they would lose all confidence in me, and then I should be of little use to the one man who could help all of us. I judged that what Ranjoor Singh most needed was a silent servant who would watch and obey the first hint. There should be deeds, not words, for the foundation of a new beginning between him and me.

In the second place, sahib, I knew that if I should advance an opinion it would be pounced on, and changed out of all recognition, yet named my opinion nevertheless. This altered opinion they would presently adopt, yet calling it mine, and when the outcome of it should fail at last to please them they would blame me. For such is the way of the world. So I had two good reasons, and the words I spoke that night could have been counted without aid of pen and paper.

The long and the short of it was that morning found them undecided. There was one opinion all held—even Gooja Singh, who otherwise took both sides as to everything—that above all and before all we were all true men, loyal to our friends the British and foes of every living German or Austrian

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or Turk so long as the war should last. The Germans had bragged to us about the Turks being in the war on their side, and we had thought deeply on the subject of their choice of friends. Like and like mingle, sahib. As for us—my grandfather fought for the British in '57, and my father died at Kandahar under Bobs Bahadur. On that main issue we were all one, and all ashamed to be prisoners while our friends were facing death. But dawn found almost no two men agreed as to Ranjoor Singh, or in fact on any other point.

Not long after dawn came the Germans again, with new arguments. And this time they began to let us feel the iron underlying their persuasion. Once, to make talk and gain time before answering a question, I had told them of our labor in the bunkers on the ship that carried us from India, boasting of the coal we piled on the fire-room floor. Lo, it is always foolish to give information to the enemy—always, sahib—always! There is no exception.

Said they to us now:

"We Germans are devoting all our energy to prosecution of this war. Nearly all our able-bodied men are with the regiments. Every man must do his part, for we are a nation in arms. Even prisoners must do their part. Those who do not fight for us must work to help the men who do fight."

"Work without pay?" said I.

"Aye," said they, "work without pay. There is coal for instance. We understand that you Sikhs have proved yourselves adept at work with coal. He who can labor in the bunkers of a ship can handle pick and shovel in the mines, and most of our miners have been called up. Yet we need more coal than ever."

So, sahib. So they turned my boast against me. And the men around me, who had heard me tell the tale about our willing labor on the ship, now eyed me furiously; although at the time they had enjoyed the boast and had added details of their own. The Germans went away and left us to talk over this new suggestion among ourselves, and until afternoon I was kept busy speaking in my own defense.

"Who could have foreseen how they would use my words against us?" I demanded.

But they answered that any fool could have foreseen it, and that my business was to foresee in any case and to give them good advice. I kept that saying in my heart, and turned it against *them* when the day came.

That afternoon the Germans returned, with knowing smiles that were meant to seem courteous, and with an air of confidence that was meant to seem considerate.

"We have explained to you," said they, "what hypocrites the British are, what dust they have thrown in your eyes—how they have grown rich at your expense, keeping India in ignorance and subjection, in poverty and vice, and divided against itself. We have told you what German aims are on the other hand, and how successful our armies are on every front as the result of the consistence of those aims. We have proved to you how half the world already takes our side—how the Turks fight for us, how Persia begins to join the Turks, how Afghanistan already moves, and how India is in rebellion. Now—wouldn't you like to join our side—to throw the weight of Sikh honor and Sikh bravery into the scale with us? That would be better fun than working in the mines," said they.

"Are we offered that alternative?" I asked, but they did not answer.

They went away again and left us to our thoughts. And we talked all the rest of that day and most of the next night, arriving at no decision. When they asked me for an opinion I said—

"Ranjoor Singh told us this would be, and he gave us orders what to do."

When they asked me ought they to obey him I answered:

"Nay, choose ye! Who can make you obey against your wills?"

And when they asked me would I abide by their decision, "Can the foot walk one way," I answered, "while the body walks another? Are we not one?" said I.

"Then," said they, "you bid us consider this proposal to take part against our friends?"

"Nay," said I, "I am a true man. No man can make me fight against the British."

They thought on that for a while, and then surrounded me again, Gooja Singh being spokesman for them all.

"Then you counsel us," said he, "to choose the hard labor in the coal-mines?"

"Nay," said I. "I counsel nothing."

"But what other course is there?" said he.

"There is Ranjoor Singh," said I.

"But he desired to lead us against the British," said he.

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"Nay," said I. "Who said so?"

Gooja Singh answered—

"He, Ranjoor Singh himself, said so."

"Nay," said I. "I heard what he said. He said he will lead us, but he said nothing of his plan. He did not say he will lead us against the British."

"Then it was the Germans. They said so," said Gooja Singh. "They said he will lead us against the British."

"The Germans said," said I, "that their armies are outside Paris—that India is in rebellion—that Pertab Singh was hanged in Delhi—that the British rule in India has been altogether selfish—that our wives and children have been butchered by the British in cold blood. The Germans," said I, "have told us very many things."

"Then," said he, "you counsel us to follow Ranjoor Singh?"

"Nay," said I. "I counsel nothing."

"You are a coward!" said he. "You are afraid to give opinion!"

"I am one among many!" I answered.

They left me alone again and talked in groups, Gooja Singh passing from one group to another like a man collecting tickets. Then, when it was growing dusk, they gathered once more about me and Gooja Singh went through the play of letting them persuade him to be spokesman.

"If we decide to follow Ranjoor Singh," said he, "will you be one with us?"

"If that is the decision of you all," said I, "then yes. But if it is Gooja Singh's decision with the rest consenting, then no. Is that the decision of you all?" I asked, and they murmured a sort of answer.

"Nay!" said I. "That will not do! Either yes or no. Either ye are willing or ye are unwilling. Let him who is unwilling say so, and I for one will hold no judgment against him."

None answered, though I urged again and again.

"Then ye are all willing to give Ranjoor Singh a trial?" said I; and this time they all answered in the affirmative.

"I think your decision well arrived at!" I made bold to tell them then. "To me it seems you have all seen wisdom, and although I had thoughts in mind," said I, "of accepting work in the collieries and blowing up a mine perhaps, yet I defer to you all."

They were much more pleased with that speech than if I had admitted the truth, that I would never have agreed to any other plan. So that now they were much more ready than they might have been to listen to my next suggestion.

"But," said I, with an air of caution, "shall we not keep any watch on Ranjoor Singh?"

"Let us watch!" said they. "Let us be forehanded!"

"But how?" said I. "He is an officer. He is not bound to lay bare his thoughts to us."

They thought a long time about that. It grew dark, and we were ordered to our huts, and lights were put out, and still they lay awake and talked of it. At last Gooja Singh flitted like a shadow through the dark and came to me and asked me my opinion on the matter.

"One of you go and offer to be his servant," said I. "Let that servant serve him well. A good servant should know more about his master than the master knows himself."

"Who shall that one be?" he asked; and he went back to tell the men what I had said.

After midnight he returned.

"They say you are the one to keep watch on him," said he.

"Nay, nay!" said I, with my heart leaping against my ribs but my voice belying it. "If I agree to that, then later you will swear I am his friend and condemn me in one judgment with him!"

"Nay!" said he. "Nay truly! On the honor of a Sikh!"

"Mine is also the honor of a Sikh," said I, "and I will cover it with care. Go back to them," said I, "and let them all come and speak with me at dawn."

"Is my word not enough?" said he.

"Was Ranjoor Singh's enough?" said I, and he went muttering to himself.

I SLEPT until dawn—the first night I had slept in three—and before breakfast they all clustered about me, urging me to be the one to keep close watch on Ranjoor Singh.

"God forbid that I should be stool-pigeon," said I. "Ranjoor Singh has only to give an order ye have no liking for and ye will shoot me in the back for it!"

The more they urged the more I hung back, and we ate before I gave them any answer.

"This is a plot," said I, "to get me in

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trouble. What did I ever do that ye should combine against me?"

"Nay!" said they. "By our Sikh oath, we be true men and your friends. Why do you doubt us?"

"If ye demand it—if ye insist—I will be the go-between. Yet I do it because ye compel me by weight of unanimity!" said I. "It is against my inclination!"

"It is your place!" said they, but I shook my head, and to this day I have never admitted to them that I undertook the work willingly.

Presently came the Germans to us again, this time accompanied by officers in uniform, who stood apart and watched with an air of passing judgment. They asked us now pointblank whether or no we were willing to work in the coal-mines, and we answered with one voice that we were no coal-miners and therefore not willing.

"The alternative," said they, "is that you apply to fight on the side of the Central Empires. Men must all either fight or work in these days; there is no room for idlers."

"Is there no other work we could do?" asked Gooja Singh.

"None that we offer you!" said they. "If you apply to be allowed to fight on the side of the Central Empires, then your application will be considered. However, you would be expected to forswear allegiance to Great Britain, and to take the military oath as provided by our law; so that in the event of any lapse of discipline or loyalty to our cause you could be legally dealt with."

"And the alternative is the mines?" said I.

"No, no!" said the chief of them. "You must not misunderstand. Your present destination is the coal-mines, where you are to earn your keep. But the suggestion is made to you that you might care to apply for leave to fight on our side. In that case we would not send you to the coal-mines until at least your application had been considered. It is practically certain that it would be considered favorably. There is positively no compulsion."

Many of the men had not heard properly. So I bade four men lift me, and I shouted to them in our tongue all that the German had said. There fell a great silence, and the four men let me drop to the earth between them.

"So is this the trap Ranjoor Singh would lead us into?" said the trooper nearest me, and though he spoke low, so still were we all that fifty men heard him and murmured. So I spoke up. Said I:

"We will answer when we shall have spoken again with Ranjoor Singh. He shall give our answer. It is right that a regiment should answer through its officer, and any other course is lacking discipline!"

Sahib, I have been surprised a thousand times in this war, but not once more surprised than by the instant effect my answer had. It was a random answer, made while I searched for some argument to use; but the German spokesman turned at once and translated to the officers in uniform, Watching them very closely I saw them laugh, and it seemed to me they approved my answer and disapproved some other matter. I think they disapproved the civilian method of mingling with us in a mob, for a moment later the order was given us in English to fall in, and we fell in two-deep.

Then the civilian Germans drew aside and one of the officers in uniform strode toward the entrance gate. We waited in utter silence, wondering what next, but the officer had not been gone ten minutes when we caught sight of him returning with Ranjoor Singh striding beside him.

Ranjoor Singh and he advanced toward us and I saw Ranjoor Singh speak with him more emphatically than his usual custom. Evidently Ranjoor Singh had his way, for the officer spoke in German to the others and they all walked out of the compound in a group, leaving Ranjoor Singh facing us. He waited until the gate clanged shut behind them before he spoke.

"Well?" said he. "I was told the regiment asked for word with me. What is the word?"

"Sahib," said I, standing out alone before the men, not facing him but near one end of the line, so that I could raise my voice with propriety and all the men might hear. He backed away, to give more effect to that arrangement. "Sahib," I said, "we are in a trap. Either we go to the mines, or we fight for the Germans against the British. What is your word on the matter?"

"Ho!" said he. "Is it as bad as that? As bad as that?" said he. "If ye go to the mines to dig coal, they will use that coal to make ammunition for their guns! That seems a poor alternative! They fight as much with ammunition as with men!"

"Sahib," said I. "It is worse than that! They seek to compel us to sign a paper,

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forswearing our allegiance to Great Britain and claiming allegiance to them! Should we sign it, that makes us out traitors in the first place, and amenable to their law in the second place."

"They could shoot you in the mines," said he, "if you failed to dig enough coal to please them. They would call it punishment for malingering—or some such name. If they take it into their heads to have you all shot, doubt not they will shoot!"

"Yet in that case," said I, "we should not be traitors."

"I will tell you a story," said he, and we held our breath to listen, for this was his old manner. This had ever been his way of putting recruits at ease and of making a squadron understand. In that minute, for more than a minute, men forgot they had ever suspected him.

"When I was a little one," said he, "my mother's aunt, who was an old hag, told me this tale. There was a pack of wolves that hunted in a forest near a village. In the village lived a man who wished to be headman. Abdul was his name, and he had six sons. He wished to be headman that he might levy toll among the villagers for the upkeep of his sons, who were hungry and very proud. Now Abdul was a cunning hunter, and his sons were strong. So he took thought, and chose a season carefully and set his sons to dig a great trap. And so well had Abdul chosen—so craftily the six sons digged—that one night they caught all that wolf-pack in the trap. And they kept them in the trap two days and a night, that they might hunger and thirst and grow amenable.

"Then Abdul leaned above the pit, and peered down at the wolves and began to bargain with them. 'Wolves,' said he, 'Your fangs be long, and your jaws be strong, and I wish to be headman of this village!' And they answered, 'Speak, O Abdul, for these walls be high, and our throats be dry, and we wish to hunt again!' So he bade them promise that if he let them go they would seek and slay the present headman and his sons, so that he might be headman in his place. And the wolves promised. Then when he made them swear by a hundred oaths in a hundred different ways, and had bound them to keep faith by God and by earth and sky and sea and by all the holy things he could remember, he stood aside and bade his six sons free the wolves.

"The sons obeyed, and helped the wolves out of the trap. And instantly the wolves fell on all six sons, and slew and devoured them. Then they came and stood round Abdul with their jaws adrip with blood.

" 'O wolves,' said he, trembling with fear and anger, 'ye are traitors! Ye are forsworn! Ye are faithless ones!'

"But they answered him, 'O Abdul, shall he who knows not false from true judge treason?' and forthwith they slew him and devoured him, and went their way.

"Now, which had the right of that—Abdul or the wolves?"

"We are no wolves!" said Gooja Singh in a whining voice. "We be true men!"

"Then I will tell you another story," Ranjoor Singh answered him. And we listened again, as men listen to the ticking of a clock. "This is a story the same old woman, my mother's aunt told me when I was very little.

"There was a man—and this man's name also was Abdul —who owned a garden, and in it a fish-pond. But in the fish-pond were no fish. Abdul craved fish to swim hither and thither in his pond, but though he tried times out of number he could catch none. Yet at fowling he had better fortune, and when he laid his net on land he caught a dozen birds.

" 'So-ho!' said Abdul, being a man much given to thought, and he went about to strike a bargain. 'O birds,' said he, 'are ye willing to be fish? For I have no fishes swimming in my pond, yet my heart desires them greatly. So if ye are willing to be fish and will stay in my good pond and swim there, gladdening my eyes, I will abstain from killing you but instead will set you in the pond and let you live.'

"So the birds, who were very terrified, declared themselves willing to be fish, and the birds swore even more oaths than Abdul insisted on, so that he was greatly pleased and very confident. Therefore he used not very much precaution when he came to plunge the birds into the water, and the instant he let go of them the birds, with feathers scarcely wet, flew away and perched on the trees about him.

"Then Abdul grew very furious. 'O birds,' said he, 'ye are traitors. Ye are forsworn! Ye are liars—breakers of oaths —deceitful ones!' And he shook his fist at them and spat, being greatly enraged and grieved at their deception.

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"But the birds answered him, 'O Abdul, a captive's gyves and a captive's oath are one, and he who rivets on the one must keep the other!' And the birds flew away, but Abdul went to seek his advocate to have the law of them! Now what think ye was the advocate's opinion in the matter, and what remedy had Abdul?"

HAS the sahib ever seen three hundred men all at the same time becoming conscious of the same idea? That is quite a spectacle. There was no whispering, nor any movement except a little shifting of the feet. There was nothing on which a watchful man could lay a finger. Yet between one second and the next they were not the same men, and I, who watched Ranjoor Singh's eyes as if he were my opponent in a duel, saw that he was aware of what had happened, although not surprised. He made no sign except the shadow of one that I detected, and he did not change his voice—as yet.

"As for me," he said, telling a tale again, "I wrote once on the seashore sand and signed my name beneath. A day later I came back to look, but neither name nor words remained. I was what I had been, and stood where the sea had been, but what I had written in sand affected neither me, nor sea, nor any man. Thought I, if one had lent me money on such a perishable note the courts would now hold him at fault, not me; they would demand evidence, and all he could show them would be what he had himself bargained for. Now it occurs to me that seashore sand, and the tricks of rogues, and blackmail, and tyranny perhaps are one!"

Eye met eye, all up and down both lines of men. There was swift searching of hearts, and some of the men at my end of the line began talking to me in low tones. So I spoke up and voiced aloud what troubled them.

"If we sign this paper, sahib," said I, "how do we know they will not find means of bringing it to the notice of the British?"

"We do not know," he answered. "Let us hope. Hope is a great good thing. If they chained us, and we broke the chains, they might send the broken links to London in proof of what thieves we be. Who would gain by that?"

I saw a very little frown now, and knew that he judged it time to strike on the heated metal. But Gooja Singh stepped forward shameless as an auctioneer, and turned his back on Ranjoor Singh.

"Let him sign this thing," said he, "and let us sign our names beneath his name. Then he will be in the same trap with us all."

So Gooja Singh offered himself, all unintentionally, to be the scapegoat for us all, and I have seldom seen a man so shocked by what befell him. Only a dozen words spoke Ranjoor Singh, yet it was as if he lashed him and left him naked. A fool's words are but empty sound, but the words of a wise man are like whips.

"Who gave thee leave to yelp?" said he, and Gooja Singh faced about like a man struck. By order of the Germans he and I stood in the place of captains on parade, he on the left and I on the right.

"To your place!" said Ranjoor Singh. Gooja Singh stepped back into line with me, but Ranjoor Singh was not satisfied.

"To your place in the rear!" he ordered. And so I have seen a man who lost a lawsuit slink 'round a corner of the court.

Then I spoke up, being stricken with self-esteem at sight of Gooja Singh's shame—for I always knew him to be my enemy.

"Sahib," said I, "shall I pass down the line and ask each man whether he will sign what the Germans ask?"

"Aye!" said he. "Like the carrion crows at judgment! Halt!" he ordered, for already I had taken the first step. "When I need to send a *daffadar*," said he, "to ask my men's permission, I will call for a *daffadar!* To the rear where you belong!" he ordered.

And I went 'round to the rear, knowing something of Gooja Singh's sensations, but loving him no better for the fellow feeling. When my footfall had altogether ceased and there was silence in which one could have heard an insect falling to the ground, Ranjoor Singh spoke again.

"There has been enough talk," said he. "In pursuance of a plan, I intend to sign whatever the Germans ask. Those who would rather go to the mines may do so. Those who prefer not to sign—fall out! Fall out, I say!"

Not a man fell out, sahib. But that was not enough for Ranjoor Singh.

"Those who intend to sign the paper—Two paces forward—march!" said he. As one man we took two paces forward.

"So!" said he.

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"Right turn!" And we turned to the right. "Forward! Quick march!" he ordered. And he made us march twice in a square about him before he halted us again and turned us to the front to face him.

Then he was fussy about our alinement, making us take up our dressing half a dozen times; and when he had us to his satisfaction finally, he stood eying us for several minutes before turning his back and striding with great dignity toward the gate.

He talked through the gate and very soon a dozen Germans entered, followed by three soldiers carrying a table and a chair. The table was set down in their midst, facing us, and the senior German officer—in a uniform with a very high collar—handed a document to Ranjoor Singh. When he had finished reading it he stepped forward and read it aloud to us. It was in Punjabi, and the gist of it was this:

We, being weary of British misrule, British hypocrisy, and British arrogance thereby renounced allegiance to Great Britain, its king and Government, and begged earnestly to be permitted to fight on the side of the Central Empires in the cause of freedom. It was expressly mentioned, I remember, that we made this petition of our own initiative and of our own free will, no pressure having been brought to bear on us, and nothing but kindness having been offered us since we were taken prisoners.

"That is what we are all required to sign," said Ranjoor Singh when he had finished reading, and he licked his lips in a manner I had never seen before.

Without any further speech to us he sat down at the table and wrote his name with a great flourish on the paper, setting down his rank beside his name. Then he called to me, and I sat and wrote my name below his, adding my rank also. And Gooja Singh followed me. After him in single file came every surviving man of Outram's Own. Some men scowled, and some men laughed harshly, and if one of our race had been watching on the German behalf he would have been able to tell them something. But the Germans mistook the scowls for signs of anger at the British, and the laughter they mistook for rising spirits, so the whole affair passed off without exciting their suspicion.

Nevertheless I noted two things. My heart warned me that the Germans would not trust a regiment seduced as we were supposed to have been. And although Ranjoor Singh had had his way with us, the very having of his way had once more destroyed the reawakening trust in him. The troopers felt that he had led them through the gates of treason. I could feel their thought as a man feels the breath of coming Winter on his cheek.

When the last man had signed we stood at attention and a wagon-load of rifles was brought in, drawn by oxen. They gave a rifle to each of us, and we were made to present arms while the German military oath was read aloud. After that the Germans walked away as if they had no further interest. Only Ranjoor Singh remained, and he gave us no time just then for comment or discontent.

The Mauser rifles were not so very much unlike our own, and he set us to drilling with them, giving us patient instruction but very little rest until evening. During the longest pause in the drill he sent for haversacks and served us out one each, filled down to the smallest detail with everything a soldier could need, even to a little cup that hung from a hook beneath one corner. We were utterly worn out when he left us at nightfall, but there was a lot of talking nevertheless before the men fell asleep.

"This is the second time he has trapped us in deadly earnest!" was the sum of the general complaint they hurled at me. And I had no answer to give them, knowing well that if I took his part I should share his condemnation—which would help none of us.

"My thought, of going to the mines and being troublesome was best!" said I. "Ye overruled me."

They were so busy defending themselves to themselves against that charge that they said no more until sleep fell on them; and at dawn Ranjoor Singh took hold of us again and made us drill until our feet burned on the gravel and our ears were full of the tramp-tramp-tramp, and the *ek-do-tin* of manual exercise.

"Listen!" said he to me when he had dismissed us for dinner, and I lingered on parade. "Caution the men that any breach of discipline would be treated under German military law by drumhead court martial and sentence of death by shooting. Advise them to avoid indiscretions of any kind," said he.

So I pretended the suggestion was my own and they resented it, as I knew they would. But I observed that from about that time

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they began to look on Ranjoor Singh as their only possible protector against the Germans, so that their animosity against him was offset by self-interest.

THE next day came a staff officer who knew Punjabi and marched with us to the station, where a train was waiting. Impossible though it may seem, sahib, to you who listen, I felt sad when I looked back at the row of huts that had been our prison, and I think we all did. We had loathed them with all our hearts all Summer long, but now they represented what we knew, and we were marching away to what we knew not, with the Autumn and Winter brooding on our prospects.

Not all our wounded had been returned to us; some had died in the German hospitals. Two-hundred-and-five-and-thirty of us all told, including Ranjoor Singh, lined up on the station platform—fit and well to the last man, and perhaps a little fatter than was seemly.

Having no belongings other than the rifles and haversacks and what we stood in, it took us but a few moments to entrain. Almost at once the engine whistled and we were gone, wondering whither. Some of the troopers shouted to Ranjoor Singh to ask our destination, but he affected not to hear. Our German staff officer rode in the front compartment alone, and Ranjoor Singh rode alone in the next behind him; but they converesed often through the window, and at stations where the two of them got out to stretch their legs along the platform they might have been brothers-in-blood relating love-affairs. Our troopers wondered.

"Our fox grows gray," said they, "but his impudence increases."

"Would it help us out of this predicament," said I, "if he smote that German in the teeth and spat on him?"

They laughed at that and passed the remark along from window to window, until I roared at them to keep their heads in.

There were six of us non-commissioned officers and we rode in one compartment behind the officers' carriage, Gooja Singh making much unpleasantness because there was not enough room for us all to lie full length. We were locked into our compartment and the only chance we had of speaking with Ranjoor Singh was when they brought us food at stations and he strode down the train to see that each man had his share.

"What is our destination?" we asked him then repeatedly.

"If ye be true men," he answered, "why are ye troubled about destination? Can the truth lead you into error? Do I seem afraid?" said he.

That was answer enough if we had been the true men we claimed to be; and he gave us no other. So we watched the sun and tried to guess roughly, I recalling all the geography I ever knew yet failing to reach conclusions that satisfied myself or any one. We knew that Turkey was in the war, and we knew that Bulgaria was not. Yet we traveled eastward, and southeastward.

I know now that we traveled over the edge of Germany into Austria, through Austria into Hungary, and through a great part of Hungary to the River Danube, growing so weary of the train that I for one looked back to the Flanders trenches as to long-lost happiness! Dozens of German regiments kept passing and repassing us. Some cheered us and some were insulting, but all of them regarded us with more or less astonishment.

The Austrians were more openly curious about us than the Germans had been, and some of them tried to get into conversation, but this was not encouraged; when they climbed on the footboards to peer through the windows and ask us questions, officers ordered them away.

Of all the things we wondered at on that long ride the German regiments impressed us most. Those that passed and repassed us were mostly artillery and infantry, and surely in all the world before there never were such regiments as those—with the paint worn off their cannon, and their clothes soiled, yet with an air about them of successful plunderers, confident to the last degree of arrogance in their own efficiency—not at all like French or British regiments.

It was Ranjoor Singh who drew my attention to the fact that regiments passing us in one direction would often pass us again on their way back, sometimes within the day.

"As shuttles in a loom!" said he. "As long as they can do that they can fight on a dozen fronts." His words set me wondering so that I did not answer him. He was speaking through our carriage window and I stared out beyond him at a train-load of troops on the far side of the station.

"One comes to us," said I. I was watching a German sergeant, who had dragged his

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belongings from that train and was crossing toward us.

"Aye!" said Ranjoor Singh, so that I knew now there had been purpose in his visit. "Beware of him."

Then he unlocked the carriage door and waited for the German.

The German came, and cursed the man who bore his baggage, and halted before Ranjoor Singh, staring into his face with a manner of impudence new to me. Ranjoor Singh spoke about ten words to him in German and the sergeant there and then saluted very respectfully. I noticed that the German staff officer was watching all this from a little distance, and I think the sergeant caught his eye.

At any rate, the sergeant made his man throw the baggage through our compartment door. The man returned to the other train. The sergeant climbed in next to me. Ranjoor Singh locked the door again, and both trains proceeded. When our train was beginning to gain speed the newcomer shoved me in the ribs abruptly with his elbow.

"So much for knowing languages!" said he to me, in fairly good Punjabi. "Curse the day I ever saw India, and triple-curse this system of ours that enabled them to lay finger on me in a moving train and transfer me to this funeral procession! Curse you, and curse this train, and curse all Asia!"

Then he thrust me in the ribs again, as if that were a method of setting aside formality.

"You know Cawnpore?" said he, and I nodded.

"You know the Kaiser-i-hind Saddle Factory?"

I nodded again, being minded to waste no words, because of Ranjoor Singh's warning.

"I took a job as foreman there twenty years ago because the pay was good. I lived there fifteen years until I was full to the throat of India—Indian food, Indian women, Indian drinks, Indian heat, Indian smells, Indian everything. I hated it, and I threw up the job in the end. Said I to myself 'Thank God,' said I, 'to see the last of India.' And I took passage home on a German steamer and drank enough German beer on the way to have floated two ships her size! *Echt Deutches bier*, you understand?" said he, nudging me in the ribs with each word. '*Echt*' means real, as distinguished from the export stuff in bottles. I drank it by the barrel, straight off ice, and it went to my head!

"That must be why I boasted about knowing three Indian languages before I had been two hours in port. I was drunk, and glad to be home, and on the lookout for another job to keep from starving; so I boasted I could speak and write Urdu and Punjabi. That brought me employment in an export house. But who would have guessed it would end in my being dragged away from my regiment to march with a lot of Sikhs? Eh? Who would have guessed it? There goes my regiment one way, and here go I another? What's our destination? God knows! Who are you, and what are you? God neither knows nor cares! What's to be the end of this? The end of me, I expect—and all because I got drunk on the way home! If I get alive out of this," said he, "I'll get drunk once for the glory of God and then never touch beer again!"

And he struck me on the thigh with his open palm. The noise was like powder detonating, and the pain was acute. I cursed him in his teeth and he grinned at me as if he and I were old friends. Little blue eyes he had, sahib—light blue, set in full red cheeks. There were many little red veins criss-crossed under the skin of his face, and his breath smelt of beer and tobacco. I judged he had the physical strength of a buffalo, although doubtless short of wind.

He had very little hair. Such as he had was yellow, but clipped so short that it looked white. His yellow mustache was turned up thus at either corner of his mouth; and the mouth was not unkind, not without good humor.

"What is your name?" said I.

"Tugendheim," said he. "I am Sergeant Fritz Tugendheim, of the 28ıst—Pappenheim—regiment of infantry, and would God I were with my regiment! What do they call you?"

"Hira Singh," said I.

"And your rank?"

"Daffadar," said I.

"Oh-ho!" said he. "So we're all sergeants in here, are we? Seven of us, eh? Seven is a lucky number! Well—" He looked us each slowly in the face, narrowing his eyes so that we could scarcely see them under the yellow lashes. "Well," said he, "they won't mistake me for any of you, nor any of you for me—not even if I should grow whiskers!"

He laughed at that joke for about two minutes, slapping me on the thigh again and

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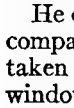
laughing all the louder when I showed my teeth. Then he drew out a flask of some kind of pungent spirits from his pocket, and offered it to me. When I refused he drank the whole of it himself and flung the glass flask through the window. Then he settled himself in the corner from which he had ousted me, put his feet on the edge of the seat opposite, and prepared to sleep. But before very long our German staff officer shouted for him and he went in great haste, a station official opening the door for him and locking us in again afterward. He rode for hours with the staff officer, and Gooja Singh examined the whole of his kit, making remarks on each piece to the great amusement of us all.

He came back before night to sleep in our compartment, but before he came I had taken opportunity to pass word through the window to the troopers in the carriage next behind.

"Ranjoor Singh," said I, "warns us all to be on guard against this German. He is a spy set to overhear our talk."

That word went all down the train from window to window and it had some effect, for during all the days that followed, Tugendheim was never once able to get between us and our thoughts, although he tried a thousand times.



NIGHT followed day, and day night. Our train crawled, and waited, and crawled, and waited, and we in our compartment grew weary to the death of Tugendheim. A thousand times I envied Ranjoor Singh alone with his thoughts in the next compartment; and so far was he from suffering because of solitude that he seemed to keep more and more apart from us, only passing swiftly down the train at mealtimes to make sure we all had enough to eat and that there were no sick.

I myself reached the conclusion that we were being sent to fight against the Russians, but suddenly we reached a broad river I knew must be the Danube, and were allowed at last to leave the train. We were so glad to move about again that any news seemed good news, and when Ranjoor Singh after much talk with our staff officer and some other Germans came and told us that Bulgaria had joined the war on the side of the Central Powers we laughed and applauded.

"That means that our road lies open before us," Ranjoor Singh said darkly.

"Our road whither?" said I.

"To Stamboul!" said he.

"What are we to do at Stamboul?" asked Gooja Singh, and the staff officer, whose name I never knew, heard him and came toward us.

"At Stamboul," said he, in fairly good Punjabi, "you will strike a blow beside our friends the Turks. Not very far from Stamboul you shall be given opportunity for vengeance on the British. The next-to-the-last stage of your journey lies through Bulgaria, and the beginning of it will be on that steamer."

We saw the steamer, lying with its nose toward the bank. It was no very big one for our number, but they marched us to it, Ranjoor Singh striding at our head as if all the world were unfolding before him, and all were his. We were packed on board and the steamer started at once, Ranjoor Singh and the staff officer sharing the upper part with the steamer's captain, and Tugendheim elbowing us for room on the open deck. So we journeyed for a whole day and part of a night down the Danube, Tugendheim pointing out to me things I should observe along the route, but grumbling vastly at separation from his regiment.

"You cursed Sikhs!" said he. "I would rather march with lice—yet what can I do? I must obey orders. See that castle!" There were many castles, sahib, at bends and on hill-tops overlooking the river. "They built that," said he, "in the good old days before men ever heard of Sikhs. Life was worth while in those days, and a man lived a lifetime with his regiment!"

"Ah!" said I, choosing not to take offense; for one fool can make trouble that perhaps a thousand wise men can not still. If he had thought, he must have known that we Sikhs spend a lifetime with our regiments, and therefore know more about such matters than any German reservist. But he was little given to thought, although not ill-humored in intention.

"Behold that building!" said he. "That looks like a brewery! Consider the sea of beer they brew there once a month, and then think of your oath of abstinence and what you miss!"

So he talked, ever nudging me in the ribs until I grew sore and my very gorge revolted at his foolishness. So we sailed, passing

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along a river that at another time would have delighted me beyond power of speech. A day and a night we sailed, our little steamer being one of a fleet all going one way. Tugs and tugs and tugs there were, all pulling strings of barges. It was as if all the tugs and barges out of Austria were hurrying with all the plunder of Europe God knew whither.

"Whither are they taking all this stuff?" I asked Ranjoor Singh when he came down among us to inspect our rations.

He and I stood together at the stern, and I waved my arm to designate the fleet of floating things. We were almost the only troops, although there were soldiers here and there on the tugs and barges, taking charge and supervising.

"To Stamboul," said he. "Bulgaria is in. The road to Stamboul is open."

"Sahib," said I, "I know you are true to the Raj. I know the surrender in Flanders was the only course possible for one to whom the regiment had been entrusted. I know this business of taking the German side is all pretense. Are we on the way to Stamboul?"

"Aye," said he.

"What are we to do at Stamboul?" I asked him.

"If you know all you say you know," said he, "why let the future trouble you?"

"But—" said I.

"Nay," said he, "there can be no *but*. There is false, and true. The one has no part in the other. What say the men?"

"They are true to the Raj," said I.

"All of them?" he asked.

"Nay, sahib," said I. "Not quite all of them, but almost all."

He nodded.

"We shall discover before long which are false and which true," said he, and then he left me.

So I told the men that we were truly on our way to Stamboul and there began new wondering and new conjecturing. The majority decided at once that we were to be sent to Gallipoli to fight beside the Turks in the trenches there, and presently they all grew very determined to put no obstacle in the Germans' way but to go to Gallipoli with good-will. Once there, said they all, it should be easy to cross to the British trenches under cover of the darkness.

"We will take Ranjoor Singh with us," they said darkly.

I saw one man hold his turban end as if it were a bandage over his eyes, and several others snapped their fingers to suggest a firing party. Many of the others laughed. Men in the dark, thought I, should rather watch and listen. Outlines change with the dawn, thought I, and I determined to reserve my judgment on all points except one —that I set full faith in Ranjoor Singh. But the men for the most part had passed judgment and decided on a plan; so it came about that there was no trouble in the matter of getting them to Stamboul—or Constantinople, as Europeans call this city.

At a place in Bulgaria whose name I have forgotten we disembarked and became escort to a caravan of miscellaneous stores, proceeding by forced marches over an abominable road. And after I forget how many days and nights we reached a railway and were once more packed into a train. Throughout that march, although we traversed wild country where any or all of us might easily have deserted among the mountains, Ranjoor Singh seemed so well to understand our intention that he scarcely troubled himself to call the roll.

He sat alone by a little fire at night, and slept beside it wrapped in an overcoat and blanket. And when we boarded a train again he was once more alone in a compartment to himself. Once more I was compelled to sit next to Tugendheim.

I grew no fonder of Tugendheim, although he made many efforts to convince me of his friendship, making many prophetic statements to encourage me.

"Soon," said he, "you shall have your bayonet in the belly of an Englishman! You will be revenged on them for '57!"

My grandfather fought for the British in '57, sahib, and my father, who was little more than old enough to run, carried food to him where he lay on the Ridge before Delhi, the British having little enough food at that time to share among their friends. But I said nothing, and Tugendheim thought I was impressed—as indeed I was.

"You will need to fight like the devil," said he, "for if they catch you they'll skin you!"

Partly he wished to discover what my thoughts were, and partly I think his intention was to fill me with fighting courage; and since it would not have done to keep silence altogether, I began to project the matter further and to talk of what might be

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after the war should have been won. I made him believe that the hope of all us Sikhs was to seek official employment under the German Government; and he made bold to prophesy a good job for every one of us. We spent hours discussing what nature of employment would best be suited to our genius, and he took opportunity at intervals to go to the staff officer and acquaint him with all that I had said. By the time we reached Stamboul at last I was more weary of him than an ill-matched bullock of its yoke.

BUT we did reach Stamboul in the end, on a rainy morning, and marched wondering through its crooked streets, scarcely noticed by the inhabitants. Men seemed afraid to look long at us, but glanced once swiftly and passed on. German officers were everywhere, many of them driven in motor-cars at great speed through narrow thoroughfares, scattering people to right and left; the Turkish officers appeared to treat them with very great respect—although I noticed here and there a few who looked indifferent, and occasionally others who seemed to me indignant.

The mud, though not as bad as that in Flanders, was nearly as depressing. The rain chilled the air, and shut in the view, and few of us had very much sense of direction that first day in Stamboul. Tugendheim marching behind us, kept up an incessant growl. Ranjoor Singh, striding in front of us with the staff officer at his side shook the rain from his shoulders and said nothing.

We were marched to a ferry and taken across what I know now was the Golden Horn; and there was so much mist on the water that at times we could scarcely see the ferry. Many troopers asked me whether we were not already on our way to Gallipoli and I, knowing no more than they, bade them wait and see.

On the other side of the Golden Horn we were marched through narrow streets, uphill, uphill to a very great barrack and given a section of it to ourselves. Ranjoor Singh was assigned private quarters in a part of the building used by many German officers for their mess. Not knowing our tongue those officers were obliged to converse with him in English, and I observed many times with what distatste they did so, to my great amusement. I think Ranjoor Singh was also much amused by that, for he grew far better humored and readier to talk with me.

Sahib, that barrack was like a zoo—like the zoo I saw once at Baroda, with animals of all sorts in it—a great yellow building within walls, packed with Kurds and Arabs and Syrians of more different tribes than a man would readily believe existed in the whole world. Few among them could talk any tongue that we knew, but they were full of curiosity and crowded round us to ask questions; and when Gooja Singh shouted aloud that we were Sikhs from India they produced a man who seemed to think he knew about Sikhs, for he stood on a step and harangued them for ten minutes, they listening with all their ears.

Then came a Turk from the German officers' mess—we were all standing in the rain in an open court between four walls—and he told them truly who we were. Doubtless he added that we were in revolt against the British, for they began to welcome us, shouting and dancing about us, those who could come near enough taking our hands and saying things we could not understand.

Presently they found a man who knew some English, and urged by them he began to fill our ears with information. During our train journey I had amused myself for many weary hours by asking Tugendheim for details of the fighting he had seen and by listening to the strings of lies he thought fit to narrate. But what Tugendheim had told were almost truths compared to this man's stories; in place of Tugendheim's studied vagueness there was detail in such profusion that I can not recall now the hundredth part of it.

He told us the British fleet had long been rusting at the bottom of the sea, and that all the British generals and half the army were prisoners in Berlin. Already the British were sending tribute money to their conquerors, and the principal reason why the war continued was that the British could not find enough donkeys to carry all the gold to Berlin, and to prevent trickery of any kind the fighting must continue until the last coin should have been counted.

The British and French, he told us, were all to be compelled at the point of the sword to turn Mohammedan, and France was being scoured that minute for women to grace the harems of the Kaiser and his sons and generals, all of whom had long ago ac

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cepted Islam. The Kaiser, indeed, had become the new chief of Islam.

I asked him about the fighting in Gallipoli, and he said that was a bagatelle.

"When we shall have driven the remnants of those there into the sea," said he, "one part of us will march to conquer Egypt and the rest will be sent to garrison England and France.

When he had done and we were all under cover at last I repeated to the men all that this fool had said, and they were very much encouraged; for they reasoned that if the Turks and Germans needed to fill up their men with such lies as those, then they must have a poor case indeed. With our coats off, and a meal before us, and the mud and rain forgotten, we all began to feel almost happy; and while we were in that mood Ranjoor Singh came to us with Tugendheim at his heels.

"The plan now is to keep us here a week," said he. "After that to send us to Gallipoli by steamer."

Sahib, there was an uproar! Men could scarcely eat for the joy of getting in sight of British lines again—or rather for joy of the promise of it. They almost forgot to suspect Ranjoor Singh in that minute, but praised him to his face and even made much of Tugendheim.

But I, who followed Ranjoor Singh between the tables in case he should have any orders to give, noticed particularly that he did not say we were going to Gallipoli. He said "The plan now is to send us to Gallipoli." The trade of a leader of squadrons, thought I, is to confound the laid plans of the enemy and to invent unexpected ones of his own.

"The day we land on Gallipoli behind the Turkish trenches," said I to myself, "is unlikely to be yet, if Ranjoor Singh lives."

And I was right, sahib. But if I had been given a thousand years in which to do it I never could have guessed how Ranjoor Singh would lead us out of the trap. Can the sahib guess?

CHAPTER IV

Fear comes and goes, but a man's love lives in him.—*Eastern Proverb.*

STAMBOUL—or Constantinople as the sahib chooses to name it—was disillusionment—a city of rain and plagues and stinks! The food in barracks was maggoty. We breathed foul air and yearned for the streets; yet, once in the streets, we yearned to be back in barracks. Aye, sahib, we saw more in one day of the streets than we thought good for us, none yet understanding the breadth of Ranjoor Singh's wakefulness. He seemed to us like a man asleep in good opinion of himself—that being doubtless the opinion he wished the German officers to have of him.

Part of the German plan became evident at once, for, noticing our great enthusiasm at the prospect of being sent to Gallipoli, Tugendheim in the hope of winning praise told a German officer we ought to be paraded through the streets as evidence that Indian troops really were fighting with the Central Powers. The German officer agreed instantly, Tugendheim making faces thus and brushing his mustache more fiercely upward.

So the very first morning after our arrival we were paraded early and sent to tramp back and forth through the streets until nearly too weary to desire life. Ranjoor Singh looked perfectly contented, for which the men hated him, and beside him marched a Turk who knew English and who told him the names of streets and places.

It did not escape my observation that Ranjoor Singh was interested more than a little in the water-front. But we all tramped like dumb men, splashed to the waist with stinking street dirt, aware we were being used to make a mental impression on the Turks, but afraid to refuse obedience lest we be not sent to Gallipoli after all. One thought obsessed every single man but me. To get to Gallipoli, and escape to the British trenches during some dark night, or perish in the effort.

As for me, I kept open mind and watched. To have argued with them or have suggested alternative possibilities would have been only to enrage them and make them deaf to wise counsels when the proper time should come. And besides, I knew no more what Ranjoor Singh had in mind than a dead man knows of the weather. We marched through the streets, and marched stared at in silence, neither cheered nor mocked by the inhabitants, and Ranjoor Singh arrived at his own conclusions. Five times during that one day he halted us in the mud at a certain place near by; and while we rested he asked peculiar questions, and the Turk boasted to him, explaining many things.

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We were exhausted when it fell dark and we climbed up the hill again to barracks. Yet as we entered the barrack gate I heard Ranjoor Singh tell a German officer in English that we had all greatly enjoyed our view of the city and the exercise. I repeated what I had heard while the men were at supper, and they began to wonder greatly.

"Such a lie!" said they. "What object can he have in telling such a lie as that?"

"That surely was a lie?" I asked, and they answered that the man who truly had enjoyed such tramping to and fro was no soldier but a mud-fish.

"Then, if he lies to them," I said, "perhaps he tells us the truth after all."

They howled at me, calling me a man without understanding. Yet when I went away I left them thinking, each man for himself and that was good. I went to change the guard, for some of our men were put on sentry-go that night outside the officers' quarters, in spite of our utter weariness. We were smarter than the Kurds, and German officers like smartness.

Weary though Ranjoor Singh must have been he sat late with the German officers, for the most part keeping silence while they talked. I made excuse to go and speak with him half a dozen times, and the last time I could hardly find him among the wreaths of cigaret smoke.

"Sahib, must we really stay a week in this hole?" I asked.

"So say the Germans," said he.

"Are we to be paraded through the streets each day?" I asked.

"I understand that to be the plan," he answered.

"Then the men will mutiny!" said I.

"Nay!" said he, "Let them seek better cause than that!"

"Shall I tell them so?" said I, and he looked into my eyes through the smoke as if he would read down into my very heart.

"Aye!" said he at last. "You may tell them so!"

So I went and shook some of the men awake and told them, and when they had done being angry they laughed at me. Then those awoke the others, and soon they all had the message. On the whole it bewildered them, even as it did me, so that few dared offer an opinion and each began thinking for himself again. By morning they were in a mood to await developments.

They were even willing to tramp the streets; but Ranjoor Singh procured us a day's rest. He himself spent most of the day with the German officers, poring over maps and talking. I went to speak with him as often as I could invent excuse, and I became familiar with the word *Wassmuss* that they used very frequently. I heard the word so many times that I could not forget it.

The next day Ranjoor Singh had a surprise for us. We were all lined up in the rain and given a full month's pay. It was almost midday when the last man had received his money, and when the men filed in to dinner, Ranjoor Singh bade me go among them and ask whether they did not wish opportunity to spend their money.

So I went and asked the question. Only a few said "Yes." Many preferred to keep their money against contingencies, and some thought the question was a trick and refused to answer it at all. I returned to Ranjoor Singh and told him what they answered.

"Go and ask them again!" said he.

So I went among them again, as they lay on the cots after dinner, and most of them jeered at me for my pains. I went and found Ranjoor Singh in the officers' mess and told him.

"Ask them once more!" said he.

This third time, being in no mood to endure their mockery, I put the question with an air of mystery. They asked what the hidden meaning might be, but I shook my head and repeated the question with a smile, as if I knew indeed but would not tell.

"Says Ranjoor Singh," said I, "would the men like opportunity to spend their money?"

"No!" said most of them, and Gooja Singh asked how long it well might be before we should see money again.

"Shall I bear him a third time such an answer?" I asked, looking more mysterious than ever.

And just then it happened that Gooja Singh remembered the advice to seek better cause for mutiny. He drummed on his teeth with his fingernails.

"Very well!" said he. "Tell him we will either spend our money or let blood! Let us see what he says to that!"

"Shall I say," said I, "that Gooja Singh says so?"

"Nay, nay!" said he, growing anxious. "Let that be the regiment's answer. Name no names!"

I thought it a foolish answer, given by

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fool, but the men were in the mood to relish it and began to laugh exceedingly.

"Shall I take that answer?" said I, and they answered "Yes!" redoubling their emphasis when I objected. "The Germans do Ranjoor Singh's thinking for him these days," said one man, "take that answer and let us see what the Germans have to say to it through his mouth!"

So I went and told Ranjoor Singh, whispering to him in a corner of the officers' mess. Some Turks had joined the Germans and most of them were bending over maps that a German officer had spread upon a table in the midst; he was lecturing while the others listened. Ranjoor Singh had been listening too, but he backed into a corner as I entered, and all the while I was whispering to him I kept hearing the word *Wassmuss—Wassmuss—Wassmuss*. The German who was lecturing explained something about this *Wassmuss*.

"What is *Wassmuss?*" I asked, when I had given Ranjoor Singh the men's answer. He smiled into my eyes.

"*Wassmuss* is the key to the door," said he.

"To which door?" I asked him.

"There is only one," he answered.

"Shall I tell that to the men?" said I.

At that he began scowling at me, stroking his beard with one hand. Then he stepped back and forth a time or two. And when he saw with the corner of his eye that he had the senior German officer's attention he turned on me and glared again. There was sudden silence in the room, and I stood at attention, striving to look like a man of wood.

"It is as I said," said he, in English. "It was most unwise to pay them. Now the ruffians demand liberty to go and spend—and that means license! They have been prisoners of war in close confinement too long. You should have sent them to Gallipoli before they tasted money—or anything but work! Who shall control such men now?"

The German officer stroked his chin, eyeing Ranjoor Singh sternly, yet I thought irresolutely.

"If they would be safer on board a steamer, that can be managed. A steamer came in today, that would do," said he, as if he were speaking to himself. Yet he spoke in English—perhaps lest the Turks understand. "And there is Tugendheim, of course. Tugendheim could keep watch over them."

I think he had more to say, but at that minute Ranjoor Singh chose to turn on me fiercely and order me out of the room.

"Tell them what you have heard!" he said in Punjabi, as if he were biting my head off, and I expect the German officer believed he had cursed me. I saluted and ran, and one of the Turkish officers aimed a kick at me as I passed. It was by the favor of God that the kick missed, for had he touched me I would have torn his throat out, and then doubtless I should not have been here to tell what Ranjoor Singh did.

To this day I do not know whether he had every move planned out in his mind, or whether part was thinking and part good fortune. When a good man sets himself to thinking God puts thoughts into his heart that others can not overcome, and it may be that he simply prayed. I know not—although I know he prayed often, as a true Sikh should.

I told the men exactly what had passed, except that I did not say Ranjoor Singh had bidden me do so. I gave them to understand that I was revealing a secret, and that gave them greater confidence in my loyalty to them. It was important they should not suspect me of allegiance to Ranjoor Singh.

"It is good!" said they all, after a lot of talking and very little thought. "To be sent on board a steamer could only mean Gallipoli. There it should be easy to steal across by night to the British trenches, dragging Ranjoor Singh with us, and when we are among our friends again let him give what account of himself he may! What new shame is this, to tell the Germans we will make trouble because we have a little money at last! Surely such slander bears its own seeds of punishment!"

They began to make ready there and then and while they packed the haversacks I urged them to shout and laugh as if growing mutinous.

AN HOUR after we were ready came Ranjoor Singh, standing in the door of our quarters with that senior German officer beside him, both of them scowling at us, and the German making more than a little show of possessing a repeating pistol. So that Gooja Singh made great to-do about military compliments, rebuking several troopers in loud tones for not standing quickly to attention, and shouting to me to be more strict. I let him have his say.

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Angrily as a gathering thunder-storm Ranjoor Singh ordered us to fall in, and we scrambled out through the doorway like a pack of hunting hounds released. No word was spoken to us by way of explanation, Ranjoor Singh continuing to scowl with folded arms while the German officer went back to look the quarters over, perhaps to see whether we had done damage, or perhaps to make certain nothing had been left.

He came out in a minute or two and then we were marched out of the barrack in the dimming light, with Tugendheim falling into step behind us and the German officer smoking a cigar beside Ranjoor Singh. A Kurdish soldier carried Tugendheim's bag of belongings, and Tugendheim kicked him savagely when he dropped it in a pool of mud. I thought the Kurd would knife him, but he refrained.

I think I have said, sahib, that the weather was vile. We were glad of our overcoats. As we marched along the winding road down-hill we kept catching glimpses of the water-front through driving rain, light after light appearing as the twilight gathered. There seemed to be no one in the streets, and small wonder!

Before we were half-way down toward the water there began to be a very great noise of firing, of big and little cannon and rifles. There began to be shouting, and men ran back and forth below us. I asked Tugendheim what it all might mean, and he said that probably a British submarine had shown itself. I whispered that to the nearest men and they passed the word along. Great contentment grew among us, none caring after that for rain and mud. That was the nearest we had been to friends in oh how many months, if it truly were a submarine!

We reached the water-front and were brought to a halt in exactly the place where Ranjoor Singh had halted us those five times on the day we tramped the streets. We faced a dock that had been vacant two days ago, but where now a little steamer lay moored with ropes, smoke coming from its funnel. There was no other sign of life, but when the German officer shouted about a dozen times, the Turkish captain came ashore, wrapped in a great shawl, and spoke with him.

While they two spoke I asked Ranjoor Singh whether that truly had been a British submarine, and he nodded; but he was not able to tell me whether or not it had been hit by gun-fire. Some of the men overheard, and although we all knew that our course to Gallipoli would be the more hazardous in that event we all prayed that the artillery might have missed. Fear comes and goes, but a man's love lives in him.

When the Turkish captain and the German officer had finished talking, the Turk went back to his steamer without any apparent pleasure, and we were marched up the gangway after him. It was pitch-dark by that time and the only light was that of a lantern by which the German officer stood, eyeing us one by one as we passed. Tugendheim came last, and he talked with Tugendheim for several minutes. Then he went away, but presently returned with I should say half a company of Kurdish soldiers, whom he posted all about the dock. Then he departed finally with a wave of his cigar, as much as to say that sheet of the ledger had been balanced.

It was a miserable steamer, sahib. We stood about on iron decks and grew hungry. There were no awnings—nothing but the superstructure of the bridge, and although there were but two hundred and forty of us, including Tugendheim, we could not stow ourselves so that all could be sheltered from the rain and let the mud-cake dry on our legs and feet. There was a little cabin that Tugendheim took for himself, but Ranjoor Singh remained with us on deck. He stood in the rain by the gangway, looking first at one thing, then at another. I watched him.

Presently he went to the door of the engine-room, opened it, and looked through. I was about to look too, but he shut it in my face.

"It is enough that they make steam," said he; and I looked up at the funnel and saw steam mingled with the smoke.

In a little wheelhouse on the bridge the Turkish captain sat on a shelf, wrapped in his shawl, smoking a great pipe, and his mate, who was also a Turk, sat beside him staring at the sky. I asked Ranjoor Singh whether we might expect to have the whole ship to ourselves, said I:

"It should not be difficult to overpower those two Turks and their small crew and make them do our bidding!"

But he answered that a regiment of Kurds was expected to keep us company at dawn. Then he went up to the bridge to have word with the Turkish captain, and I

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went to the ship's side to stare about. Over my shoulder I told the men about the Kurds who were coming, and they were not pleased.

Peering into the dark and wondering that so great a city as Stamboul should show so few lights I observed the Kurdish sentinels posted about the dock.

"Those are to prevent us from going ashore until their friends come!" said I, and they snarled at me like angry wolves.

"We could easily rush ashore and slay them every one with our bayonets!" said Gooja Singh.

But not a man would have gone ashore again for a commission in the German army. Gallipoli was written on their hearts. Yet I could think of a hundred thousand chances still that might prevent our joining our friends the British in Gallipoli. Nor was I sure in my own mind that Ranjoor Singh intended we should try. I was sure only of his good faith, and content to await developments.

Though the lights of the city were few and very far between, so many search-lights played back and forth above the water that there seemed a hundred of them. I judged it impossible for the smallest boat to pass unseen and I wondered whether it was difficult or easy to shoot with great guns by aid of search-lights, remembering what strange tricks light can play with a gunner's eyes. Mist, too, kept rising off the water to add confusion.

While I reflected in that manner, thinking that the shadow of every wave and the side of every boat might be a submarine, Ranjoor Singh came down from the bridge and stood beside me.

"I have seen what I have seen!" said he. "Listen! Obey! And give me no back answers!"

"Sahib," said I, "I am thy man!" But he answered nothing to that.

"Pick the four most dependable men," he said, "and bid them enter that cabin and gag and bind Tugendheim. Bid them make no noise and see to it that he makes none, but let them do him no injury, for we shall need him presently! When that is done, come back to me here!"

So I left him at once, he standing as I had done, staring at the water, although I thought perhaps there was more purpose in his gaze than there had been in mine.

I chose four men and led them aside, they greatly wondering.

"There is work to be done," said I, "that calls for true ones!"

"Such men be we!" said all four together.

"That is why I picked you from among the rest!" said I, and they were well pleased at that. Then I gave them their orders.

"Who bids us do this?" they demanded.

"I!" said I. "Bind and gag Tugendheim, and we have Ranjoor Singh committed! He gave the order, and I bid you obey it! How can he be false to us and true to the Germans, with a gagged German prisoner on his hands?"

They saw the point of that.

"But what if we are discovered too soon?" said they.

"What if we are sunk before dawn by a British submarine!" said I. "We will swim when we find ourselves in water! For the present, bind and gag Tugendheim!"

So they went and stalked Tugendheim the German, who had been drinking from a little pocket flask. He was drowsing in a chair in the cabin, with his hands deep down in his overcoat pockets and his helmet over his eyes. Within three minutes I was back at Ranjoor Singh's side.

"The four stand guard over him!" said I.

"Very good!" said he. "That was well done! Now do a greater thing."

My heart burned, sahib, for I had once dared doubt him, yet all he had to say to me was "Well done! Now do a greater thing!" If he had cursed me a little for my earlier unbelief I might have felt less ashamed.

"Go to the men," said he, "and bid those who wish the British well to put all the money they received this morning into a cloth. Bid those who are no longer true to the British to keep their money. When the money is all in the cloth, bring it here to me."

"But what if they refuse?" said I.

"Do *you* refuse?" he asked.

"Nay!" said I. "Nay, sahib!"

"Then why judge them?" said he.

So I went.

Can the sahib imagine it? Two-hundred-and-three-and-thirty men, including sergeants, wet and muddy in the dark, beginning to be hungry, all asked at once to hand over all their pay if they be true men, but told to keep it if they be traitors?

No man answered a word, although their eyes burned up the darkness. I called for a lantern, and a man brought one from the engine-room door. By its light I spread

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out a cloth, and laid all my money on it on the deck. The sergeant nearest me followed my example. Gooja Singh laid down half his money.

"Nay!" said I. "All or none! Half-true and false be one and the same tonight!"

So Gooja Singh made a wry face and laid down the rest of his money, and the others all followed him, not at all understanding, as indeed I myself did not understand, but coming one at a time to me and laying all their money on the cloth. When the last man had done I tied the four corners of the cloth together—it was all wet with the rain and the slush on deck, and heavy with the weight of coin—and carried it to Ranjoor Singh. I forgot the four who stood guard over Tugendheim. They kept their money.

"We are all true men!" said I, dumping it beside him.

"Good!" said he. "Come!"

And he took the bundle of money and ascended the bridge-ladder, bidding me wait at the foot of it for further orders. I stood there two hours at the least without another sign of him, although I heard voices in the wheel-house.

NOW the men grew restless. Reflection without action made them begin to doubt the wisdom of surrendering all their money at a word. They began to want to know the why and wherefore of the business, and I was unable to tell them.

"Wait and see," said I, but that only exasperated them, and some began to raise their voices in anger.

So I felt urged to invent a reason, hoping to explain it away afterward should I prove wrong. But as it turned out I guessed at least a little part of Ranjoor Singh's great plan and so achieved credit that was useful later, although at the time I felt myself losing favor with them.

"Ranjoor Singh will bribe the captain of the ship to steam away before that regiment of Kurds can come on board," said I. "So we shall have the ship at our mercy, provided we make no mistakes."

That did not satisfy them, but it gave them something new to think about, and they settled down to wait in silence, as many as could, crowding their backs against the deck-house and the rest suffering in the rain. I would rather have heard them whispering, because I judged the silence to be due to low spirits. I knew of nothing more to say to encourage them, and after a time their depression began to affect me also. Rather than watch them I watched the water and more then once I saw something I did not recognize, that nevertheless caused my skin to tingle and my breath to come in jerks. Sikh eyes are keen.

It was perhaps two hours before midnight when the long spell of firing along the water-front began and I knew that my eyes and the dark had not deceived me. All the search-lights suddenly swept together to one point and shone on the top-side of a submarine—or at least on the water thrown up by its topside. Only two masts and a thing like a tower were visible, and the plunging shells threw water over those, obscuring them every second.

There was a great explosion, whether before or after the beginning of the gun-fire I do not remember, and a ship anchored out on the water no great distance from us keeled over and began to sink. One searchlight was turned on the sinking ship, so that I could see hundreds of men on her running to and fro and jumping; but all the rest of the water was now left in darkness.

The guards who had been set to prevent our landing all ran to another wharf to watch the gun-fire and the sinking ship, and it was at the moment when their backs were turned that two Turkish seamen came down from the bridge and loosed the ropes that held us to the shore. Then our ship began to move out slowly into the darkness without showing lights or sounding whistle. There was still no sign of Ranjoor Singh, nor had I time to look for him; I was busy making the men be still, urging, coaxing, cursing —even striking them.

"Are we off to Gallipoli?" they asked.

"We are off to where a true man may remember the salt!" said I, knowing no more than they.

TO BE CONTINUED

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INTO THE HILLS

by HAPSBURG LIEBE

Author of "In Full of Account," "A Little Song That He Knew," etc.

TEN-SPOT TIFTON sat up dizzily in the early morning light, yawned, and made a face so wry that it frightened a yellow dog that had been scavengering in a near-by heap of rubbish. Then Tifton spoke aloud with a sort of sick humor, and demanded of the gray silence:

"Who am I? What am I? And where am I?"

He looked slowly around him. Blank brick walls behind and before him and to his left told him that he was in a city's vacant lot. The broad-brimmed felt hat lying on the short grass beside him, his laced boots, his corduroys and his blue flannel shirt told him that he was a timberjack. Prompted by that which his eyes beheld, his memory awakened and acquainted him with the regrettable fact that he had drunk himself dead to the world the night before, pay-day night, on a foolish bet. The bet had been made with Bud Ashley, the big new man from the Blackfern camps.

Having made sure who he was and where he was, Tifton proceeded to tell himself what he was in no uncertain terms. Any man who would drink himself drunk was that. And then Ten-Spot Tifton raised his right hand there in the warm June dawn and swore an oath of the "never again" variety—an oath that is unbroken today.

Remembering further, Tifton unlaced and removed one of his boots and counted the money he had hidden in it the day before. The twenty dollars in banknotes was intact. After absentmindedly replacing both the money and the boot, he put on his hat, rose and walked a little unsteadily toward the nearest street. He was sober enough now; but he was still light-headed, and the taste in his mouth was brown.

A moment after he had reached the decaying wooden sidewalk, something fell before him with a slight tinkle. He stopped and peered downward. There at his feet lay a Lincoln penny. His gaze immediately ran upward. One of the upstairs windows in the front of the old and dingy brick building at his left was open. Somebody, evidently, had thrown the copper coin to him from that window. But—why should anybody throw a penny to him? He was no beggar. And he was very sure that he didn't look like a beggar, badly as he appeared.

Tifton picked up the copper coin and deftly tossed it back through the open window. He heard it fall on the floor inside, and he congratulated himself on his good marksmanship. Another second, and a girl's face appeared above the window-edge. She was distinctly pretty, but she

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was pale and worried-looking, and she seemed more than a little puzzled. Then she deliberately threw the Lincoln penny far out into the dusty street.

"You've got so much money you simply can't spend it all, I reckon," Tifton drawled smilingly. He was a native-born hillman, but he didn't speak in the hill dialect; logging-camps had taken that away long before.

The girl gazed down upon him queerly. He didn't like it. Somehow it make him feel small and guilty.

"That was the last cent I had on earth," she blurted. "When I come that near to bein' broke, I'd rather be broke. That's why I throwed it away. Mister, I've come to the place where the road forks. And I don't know whether to keep to the right or take to the left. And no more do I know," she added, "why I'm tellin' *you* about it."

The unhappy face withdrew, and Ten-Spot Tifton stood there staring at the four slim, almost delicate fingers that still held to the window-ledge. Most of that which she had told him had come in the sheerest desperation, pouring itself out of her heart because her heart was too full to hold it. Tifton realized this, and he thought of the twenty perfectly good American dollars in one of his boots.

It was a rooming-house, he noted by a sign that hung above the stairway door. Without seeking anybody's permission, he went hurriedly up the steps, strode through the narrow hallway, and entered the girl's cheaply furnished room. The girl stood beside a scarred old dresser and watched him dazedly. He smiled reassuringly, sat down in a creaking chair, and began to take off his right boot. A minute, and he had reached his money. From it he took half, and this he held out to the girl.

She moved toward it, then halted. Her face was very pinched and very pale.

"Maybe I—I'd better keep to the right a little longer," she said weakly, uncertainly. "Maybe I—maybe something—something will turn up——"

"God bless you!" cried Tifton. "This is a loan! It ought to be enough to take you back home. I ought to introduce myself, I reckon. I'm Ten-Spot Tifton, miss. It's my honest-to-goodness, hope-I may-die, cross-my-heart name. My oldest brother was named Asa, and they soon cut it to 'Ace.'

"The next boy was named King, after my mother's people. Then along comes a girl, and a funny uncle o' mine calls her Queenie and buys her a dress. After that, my brother Jack was born. Ace, King, Queen, Jack, and—you see, it naturally fell to my lot to be named Ten-Spot; they didn't even try to call me anything else! I'm the youngest one o' old Henry Tifton's royal straight flush, the champion scrapper o' the Lower Bad Ax Creek loggin'-camps, the swiftest chopper on record, and as square as a hossdice—if I do say it myself. Now let me hear from you miss, please; eh?"

"I'm Mary Ellen Haley," readily. "I've been fightin' my way in this town for a year, and I—well, Mr. Ten-Spot, this town has sure licked me good and proper. I'm from the country. My folks are all dead—at least, all that I care anything about are dead—and I haven't any home. I can't take your money, because I can't ever p-p-pay it back. You'd better go, Mr. Ten-Spot."

Tifton pocketed his money, replaced his boot and laced it hastily, and went to his feet.

"Sack your duds, Mary Ellen," he ordered. "You've got to leave here, because it's killin' you. I'll take you with me to the camp and get you a job. Jim Fanning's wife needs you out there."

SUPERINTENDENT FANNING'S wife had charge of the boarding-house, and she was very glad to have the help of Mary Ellen. Happiness and wholesome food and the mountain air soon had roses blooming again in the girl's cheeks, and with the return of good health she became quite remarkably pretty.

But the most striking thing about her, perhaps, was the intense gratitude she had for Ten-Spot Tifton, the man who, she believed, had saved her from the broad road.

The days went by, and Autumn came; the leaves of the trees were dying and falling, and the air was filled with the pungent aroma of smoke from distant mountain fires. Then it was that Super Jim Fanning called Tifton aside and said to him seriously:

"Take this from one o' your best friends, Ten-Spot: keep one eye on Bud Ashley day and night."

"What's that for?" the timberjack wanted to know.

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"My wife told me," Fanning said in a confidential way, "and Mary Ellen told her. Ashley's been makin' the girl's life miserable when you weren't anywhere around, and she's been afraid to tell you for fear you'd have trouble with Bud. He wants her to marry him. And—well, he's been lyin' to her like a dog about you. Now remember, Ten-Spot: Ashley's bad; he's been the champion fighter of more'n one camp, they say. And he's been tellin', I understand, that he'll soon be the champ o' this outfit, instead o' you, Ten-Spot. What d'ye know about that!"

"So Mary Ellen is afraid I'll have trouble with Bud," Tifton drawled amusedly. "Why, super, I eat trouble, and I drink trouble; I walk with trouble, and I sleep with trouble. I simply dote on trouble—I couldn't live without it! And he'll soon be the champ o' this outfit, eh? Say, Super Jim, you be on hand Sunday mornin'. I want you to see it."

Fanning nodded and smiled. He liked a good fight; and he knew that Tifton could put up just such a thing, for he had seen him do it. Tifton was slender, but he was wiry and as tough as white hickory, and his quickness was that of the hill panther.

In the evening of that same day, after supper, Tifton found an opportunity to speak privately with Mary Ellen in the big, rough dining-room. He went at once to the point—

"What did Bud say about me?"

The girl opened her eyes wide and shrank a little. She seemed afraid. The timberjack repeated his question in a manner that told Mary Ellen that he meant to have the answer, and she turned her gaze downward and stammered out regretfully—

"He said that—that you *talked* about me!"

Tifton's face went suddenly white under the bronze of his sunburn.

"Do you believe it?"

"You ought to know that I don't believe it," murmured Mary.

"You're sure right," Ten-Spot declared relieved. "I didn't talk about you. If ever I opened my mouth about you, it was to say that you was the finest and sweetest girl in the whole world. Which same you are, Mary Ellen. I'll fix this with Bud Ashley. I'll make him eat dirt. If you like to see a good fight—I beg your pardon, Mary Ellen; you don't like to see fightin', of course."

The girl stared at him frightened. He turned and strode out to the hallway, up the rough stairs, and into the sleeping-quarters of the timberjacks, which occupied the entire second story of the boarding-house.

Under a big, swinging oil lamp, Bud Ashley and three other loggers were playing cards over a wooden box. Straight to the four went Tifton; he halted beside Ashley, bent over, and growled hotly:

"On Sunday mornin' at nine o'clock, in the presence o' this whole outfit and anybody else that wants to see it, I'm goin' to beat you mighty near to death. I'm goin' to make you eat dirt until you vomit it. You know —— well what it's about. You're a lowdown, sneakin', lyin' yeller dog, Ashley; you ain't half as good as a snake. Don't open your mouth to me now, or I'll punch it clean to the back o' your neck."

Ashley smiled and looked across the box to his partner.

"Deal, Bill," he said evenly; and Bill dealt.

Fighting is the one great game of the timberjacks; and the man who is afraid of this great game is better off a few miles outside of a logging-camp. Fighting for the sheer love of combat makes a hard enough battle; but when men feel an animosity such as that between Ten-Spot Tifton and Bud Ashley—that makes for the bitterest of all battles.

Sunday morning came with the usual snap and haze of a cloudless Autumn day in the big hills. At half-past eight, the clearing around the boarding-house was alive with would-be spectators—mountaineer men and boys, timberjacks from neighboring camps, and all the Lower Bad Ax loggers but the two belligerents.

A few minutes before nine, Ten-Spot Tifton finished dressing himself for the bout. He wore shoes instead of boots, corduroy trousers belted tightly to place, a blue flannel shirt with elbow sleeves, and no hat at all. As he went down the stairs he met Mary Ellen. He saw that her face was white, and that fact hurt him like a hot knife's thrust.

"I wish you wouldn't!" she said nervously, catching one of his arms in both her hands. "Please, try to get out of it!"

Tifton straightened.

"Mary, Mary Ellen," he replied almost mournfully, "ask me to cut off a leg for you, and I'll sure do it. Ask me to bring you

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the moon to play with, and I'll sure try to get it for you. But don't ask me to back out o' this scrap. That's a thing I can't do, even for you."

By the eyes of her he knew that she was taking a grip on herself. She moved up to the step just above the step he stood upon, and he barely resisted the temptation to take her in his arms as she passed him—for there was no one to see.

"I'm sorry you must fight," she told him; "but I do hope you win. I think I'd rather die than to see you lose. Because I know what it is you're goin' to fight for."

He put his hands on her shoulders.

"If I win, Mary Ellen," he smiled, his eyes twinkling brightly, "will you let me kiss you one time?"

"A thousand times," she whispered, "if you want to."

He had saved her from the broad road; besides, she loved him.

"And," she added blushingly, "you can have one of 'em whenever you want it."

Tifton's heart jumped—yes, it actually jumped. Now he couldn't lose; no matter what Ashley had in his trick-box, Tifton just couldn't lose *now!* He took three instead of one, and ran for the grounds below.

There was a rousing cheer when the champion appeared. Ashley was already there. Except that he had removed his coat, Ashley had made no preparation, apparently. He even wore the buckskin gloves he wore when he worked in the woods.

"Afraid you'll hurt your hands?" Super Jim asked good-naturedly.

"No," returned the big man from the Blackfern. "I'm afraid I'll get 'em dirty with handlin' a skunk."

At that, Tifton laughed a little louder than anybody else laughed. He knew that keeping his head clear of anger was a great thing in his favor.

It chanced that Ashley was standing in the center of the spot that seemed most likely as a place for the combat, and Tifton walked over to him and very cleverly slapped his face for an opener.

"This is your day to eat mud," declared Tifton. "Come on and get it!"

His confidence in himself was supreme, colossal. He had never been whipped, not even as a boy. His father had never whipped him. His was the pride of the born champion, the champion who can not think of defeat because thoughts of defeat are more bitter than thoughts of death.

A BIG ring of eager faces quickly formed itself around the fighters, and the battle soon began in earnest. From the outset Ashley was on the defensive; he appeared to be saving himself carefully for a moment when he would have some particular advantage over his adversary. Tifton was lithe and magnificent; he darted in and out with the sure grace of a buck deer, with the swiftness of a blue hawk; his bare brown fists struck like lightning. Ashley's nose and mouth began to bleed; he took the punishment heroically, however.

Ten minutes, and Bud Ashley had not sent home a single effective blow. Still he seemed to be waiting for an advantage. And then the advantage came. His powerful right arm straightened with every ounce of his two hundred pounds backing it up; the blow that he planted on Ten-Spot Tifton's left temple, though somewhat glancing, sounded like the impact of an ax against a log. Ten-Spot Tifton went down and lay perfectly still where he had fallen. The fight was over, and there was a new champion at the Lower Bad Ax camp!

"I've got a notion," crowed the victor, "to set my bootcalks in his face!"

"If you do," snapped Jim Fanning, "I'll shoot you."

Tifton was wholly unconscious. Four of his friends carried him to Super Jim's bed in the downstairs of the boarding-house, and there they bathed his face with cold water and brought him too. He sat up, put a hand to his bruised and swollen temple, and glared about him wildly. Then he remembered.

"Bud knocked me out, super," he mumbled. "How did he do it?"

Two words came in answer:

"Brute strength."

After a moment, Tifton turned his eyes toward the foot of Super Jim's bed and saw the suffering white face of the Mary Ellen who loved him. But he couldn't look at her. For he had been whipped, whipped, whipped. After all that he had said, with nine hundred and ninety-seven of the sweetest kisses in the world as a reward, he had gone down in the most ignoble defeat. His heart became a great dead weight of grief instead of the citadel of his pride. He suddenly

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wished that he were far, far away from those who knew about it.

Shortly afterward, Ten-Spot Tifton rose and went out to the woods, and they saw him no more until the following day. And had they asked him where he had been, he couldn't have told them very clearly.

When he returned to the camp, Super Jim took him at once to the dining-room, and there Mrs. Fanning and Mary Ellen put food before him. Though he had missed three meals, he ate but little. Mary Ellen watched him from the kitchen, and she was awed by the pale light of grief that was on his face. Super Jim, that good, big man, wanted to show his sympathy, and he hardly knew how.

Finally he told Tifton:

"Nap Yancey and Bill Falway tackled Bud for the title yesterday afternoon, Ten-Spot, and he knocked 'em both out pretty quick. He's some scrapper, sure. You needn't feel bad about bein' knocked out by that man. He was too big for you. By the way, I'd like to switch you to Foreman Falway's gang, Ten-Spot. Because every man in that gang is your close friend."

"All right," Tifton said blankly.

There was but one reason why the ex-champion didn't leave the scene of that which he considered his eternal disgrace, and that one reason was Mary Ellen Haley. He stayed with Super Jim Fanning's outfit because it was there that he had the only pleasure that life now held for him, the pleasure of seeing the girl he loved two or three times each day. She would have gone away with him as his wife, he believed; but he couldn't ask her to marry him and share his stigma.

Mary Ellen was intensely sympathetic. Losing the fight that meant so much to him had made him far dearer to her even than the winning of that fight would have made him—women are like that. She came as near to making love to him as her modesty would permit; one day she went so far as to hint that she was ready to marry him and go to the world's end with him; but he was unresponsive, for her sake.

She couldn't hide her feelings toward him—perhaps she didn't try very hard—and the other timberjacks began to discuss it, some in one way and some in another, among themselves. Ashley was no less than enraged by it. He availed himself of every opportunity to grind in the disgrace he had brought upon Tifton; and he did it in spite of the ever open eyes of Jim Fanning. His idea, of course, was to drive Tifton away and thereby clear the path that led to the hand of Mary Ellen.

Mary Ellen saw most of this, and she reasoned that there could be but one outcome for the state of affairs that prevailed—if that state of affairs continued to prevail. Ten-Spot Tifton's outer self was little better than extinct; but his mountaineer blood, the hot blood of the hills, was still very much alive. Ashley would some day goad him to the breaking-point, and then he would crook the finger that would make him a murderer in the eye of the law and thus plow an unbridgeable gulf between him and all that was of value to him. It was inevitable, unless she could prevent it.

And she meant to prevent it, if it were possible, no matter what the cost to her. She began to watch Tifton even more closely.

Time ran on, and the humiliation of the already much humiliated timberjack did not cease. And then, one evening in October, Ashley accomplished that which was the last word in the tormenting of Ten-Spot Tifton.

THE score of Fanning's loggers had just finished supper, and they were smoking and talking at the long, rough dining-table. Jim Fanning himself was there, and he was quite the merriest one of them all. While Fanning was telling the story of a certain man who envied old Adam because old Adam had no mother-in-law, a lean face that was almost covered with a straggling set of whiskers appeared at one of the dining-room windows. Fanning saw it; he broke his story off short, and went to the window and raised the lower sash.

"Well?" he said.

He didn't remember having seen the man before.

"Whar's Ten-Spot?" drawled the stranger, in broad mountaineer dialect.

"In here," answered Super Jim. "Go around to the door and come in."

"Hain't got time," said the be-whiskered man. "Tell Ten-Spot the's agoin' to be a —— of a big dance down at Old Fuzzy Lippert's tonight, 'n' ever'body's 'nvited. And say—give this here to Ten-Spot, 'n' tell him I cain't sell the —— thing. S'long!"

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He placed a cheap watch in Fanning's hand, and then he disappeared in the darkness. Fanning turned toward the tableful of timberjacks. Tifton had gone to his feet. Bud Ashley rose and stepped backward over the peglegged slab bench he had been sitting on.

"Let me see that ticker, Super," said Ashley, rather sharply. "It looks like one that was stole from me last week."

It was Ashley's watch. He proved that fact by a dozen loggers. Then he looked toward Ten-Spot Tifton, who stood like a man dead on his feet.

"Ten-Spot, old man," he said in tones that sounded kindly to most of the others, "if you've got to be a thief, don't be a cheap thief. If you've got to steal, steal somethin' more vallyble than a two-dollar watch. Here, I want you to have it. You've earned it, Ten-Spot."

He bent forward and shoved the timepiece across the oilcloth-covered table toward Tifton.

Ashley had made an impression. Two scores of eyes were riveted on Tifton's death-white face. Tifton said nothing—he only glared—he had been stricken dumb by the cold-blooded, cunning plot of his arch enemy. To the mountainborn the hangman's rope carries with it nothing that is worse than to be held up as a cheap thief.

Even Superintendent Jim Fanning didn't know just what to think.

"Is there anything to this, Ten-Spot?" he asked.

Tifton didn't answer. He seemed not to have heard. To Mary Ellen, who stood mutely in the doorway that led to the kitchen, he gave a single, heart-broken glance, after which he walked slowly out of the dining-room and up the dark stairway.

It was dark upstairs, too, but he went as straight to his bed as though it were broad daylight. A moment, and he had a big, blued revolver in his right hand. Then he went back downstairs.

At the dinning-room door he halted and looked in. Mary Ellen still stood in the kitchen doorway, and it was only her presence there that kept him from shooting at Bud Ashley. He turned and went out into the night.

After ten minutes, he came back with his battle fought; and for Mary Ellen's sake he had won it. But he reached the steps that led to the porch, his eyes were greeted by a sight that tore down his good and hard-won resolution; in the hallway, which was now lighted, Bud Ashley stood holding one of Mary Ellen's hands in his, and the girl was struggling to get away. She freed herself and ran into the dining-room.

Ten-Spot Tifton leveled his weapon and fired. He was an almost perfect marksman, and yet— his shot was ineffective! Ashley dashed for the stairs, and as he went, Tifton fired at him again—and this shot, too, was ineffective. Tifton swore and threw the revolver far out into the blackness. The revolver was at fault. He would get a rifle. He had a good friend living half a mile away, and that friend had a good rifle.

When he returned with the repeater in his hand, there was but one light in the boarding-house, and that one was in the Fannings' sitting-room on the lower floor. He crept up to a window of that room and peered in. The superintendent and his wife sat in there, and they were talking in low voices.

"Super," he said, rapping lightly on the window, "where's all the boys?"

Fanning looked around.

"Gone to that dance at Old Fuzzy Lippert's," he answered. "Come in here, Ten-Spot."

"Ashley too?"

"All of 'em: Come in here, Ten-Spot."

"Not on your life, Super Jim. I got to go to that dance. I'm sure goin' to roughhouse that dance. Where's Mary Ellen, Super? I got to see her a minute, to say good-by."

"You come in here, Ten-Spot," Super Jim ordered sternly. "And," he added, "I'll tell you about Mary Ellen."

Another minute, and Tifton, the rifle in his hand, stood in the sitting-room of the Fannings. The superintendent rose. He looked troubled. His wife, also, seemed distinctly worried about something. Then Fanning strode forward and took the stalwart timberjack's shoulders in a strong grip.

"If I was a young man like you," began Super Jim, very seriously, "and some girl as pretty and as good as little Mary Ellen liked me as much as she likes you, I—well, I sure wouldn't run amuck as you're fixin' to do. Mary Ellen figured that you'd gone for a rifle, Ten-Spot. She went with Bud Ashley to that dance to keep you from shootin' at him; and to keep you from shootin

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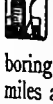
at him, she's goin' to dance every dance with him! She's doin' it for you, Ten-Spot, so you won't lay your hand to blood-red murder."

"Great Lord!" cried Tifton. "Why, Super, Old Fuzzy's place is a whisky-joint, and it ain't a nice place! The girls that'll be there—I've never seen 'em; but, anyhow, they're not as good as Mary, Mary Ellen——"

"I know it," Super Jim cut in, and his smile was white. "But there was no keepin' her back. Bill Falway and several others o' your friends promised me they'd see that she didn't come to harm, but——"

"Yes; 'but!' " repeated Ten-Spot Tifton, in a roar.

He tore himself out of Fanning's grip, ran out of the house, and ran like a buck deer down the dark, wooded valley.



OLD FUZZY LIPPERT'S establishment, which had the regular patronage of men from half a dozen neighboring logging-camps, was three long, black miles away. It was housed by a huge log cabin, and it was a little like the combined saloon and dance-hall of the West of the forty-niner. Old Fuzzy himself made the whisky that was life-blood to the place; but the revenue men didn't know that he made it, and he sold it always through sly agents on the outside, and thereby Old Fuzzy kept from running afoul of the law.

Tifton swept like a full-grown cyclone into the beginning of the first dance, and his very presence was enough to rough-house it. He drove Bud Ashley against one of the log walls with the butt of his rifle, seized Mary Ellen by the arm, and hurried her out of the whisky-scented, smoke-filled room. After depositing her behind a big tree that stood in the yard, he ran back to the doorway, and there he stood with the rifle ready.

"Old Fuzzy," he said sharply to the hairy-faced owner of the place, while his keen eyes watched everywhere for the sign of a gun, "this is your three-day notice to bust up here. If you don't, I'll get the goods on you and report 'em to some revenue men I know. Bud Ashley," to his sour-visaged enemy, "if you got any hankerin's to entertain a hunk o' forty-five lead in your lowdown carcass, follow me—and you'll sure get it."

Still with the rifle leveled, he backed out of the doorway and out of the shaft of yellow lamplight that poured through it, and hastened to Mary Ellen. With her at his side, he started rapidly for Fanning's camp.

They walked for some fifteen minutes in blank silence. It was the timberjack that broke that silence—

"I'm sorry you had to do it, Mary Ellen."

"I'm glad I did do it," was the quick reply.

After a moment, she went on, very thoughtfully—

"I've saved you as you saved me. I've saved you from the broad road, from which there's no comin' back, as you saved me. I took the bullets out o' the cartridges in your pistol day before yesterday—and it was a hard job for me—and stuffed black cloth in the places o' the bullets. That's why you didn't kill Bud Ashley at the boardin'-house. And I saved you by goin' to that low dance at that low place with Bud Ashley. I knowed you wouldn't risk shootin' at him if I was with him, Ten-Spot. And now, Ten-Spot, I want you to marry me, if you're real sure you love me well enough, and go away, away, away with me."

Tifton did not speak immediately. When he did speak, this is what he said:

"There's no doubt about me lovin' you well enough, Mary. The thing is, I love you too much to marry you as I am. If I could only thrash Bud Ashley! Then I'd feel like I was almost good enough for you. I think I'll fight Ashley again next Sunday. I think I'll go at him right sudden, and put a lickin' all over him before he can get straightened out. Would you?"

Mary Ellen had been holding loosely to his arm. Now she fairly hugged it.

"Yes," she said, "I would! And I'll try to help you, Ten-Spot."

"You help me?" He smiled a little at that. "How, Mary?"

She hugged his arm again.

"Never mind how," she told him. "You just be sure you do your part."

"By the goodness o' God," promised Ten-Spot Tifton, "I'll sure do it."

When he had given the girl over to Mrs. Fanning, Tifton went upstairs and to his bed and crept under the blankets without undressing. He took the rifle to bed with him; if Ashley came in with gunplay uppermost in his mind, he wouldn't be caught unprepared.

But Ashley didn't attempt gunplay. Ashley had had his hand called, so to speak.

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He realized that he had ridden too far with Tifton for a goat. It was a miracle, he figured, that the persecuted man had missed him two plain shots. He thought of having Tifton removed by means of the law; but he had not actually seen Tifton shoot at him, nor had anybody else; and the law, of course, required proof. And there was another thing: Ashley knew that timberjacks were slow to forgive a man for seeking outside aid in the settlement of his purely personal difficulties.

CAME Sunday, the universal play-day of the logging-camps. Super Jim Fanning's men were well into their usual Sunday boxing and wrestling in the clearing around the camp, when Ten-Spot Tifton, in his fighting clothes, walked slowly up to Bud Ashley and deliberately slapped a handful of creek mud into his open mouth.

"This," said Mary Ellen's sweetheart, with something of the old, champion's pride in his rich drawl, "this is your day to eat dirt."

For a whole minute Ashley spat mud and frothed out wicked words and marveled at that strange, new thing that had come over Tifton; and in that minute a ring of wondering and expectant onlookers formed itself about the two men. The challenger stood in trim fighting pose, quietly waiting; and those who knew him best saw in his eyes the light of the old faith in himself.

Ashley went crouching, pugilist fashion, toward the man who had crammed mud into his mouth. Tifton ducked under a terrific blow and at the same time drove a right, hard to Ashley's jaw. This initial success strengthened his confidence in the great power that was in him, and from that moment he became a lithe and splendid, pantherlike, lightninglike fighting machine. Ashley couldn't hit him. Ashley seemed to have nothing whatever in his trick-box; he waited for no particular advantage now, for there was no such advantage possible; his hands were bare now!

Tifton began to lay blow after blow on Ashley's mouth, and soon the bigger man lost his head and abandoned even the crudest of timberjack fighting tactics. Tifton's friends yelled, and at that Ashley became almost maniacal; he roared in his blind rage, and made dashes that were as futile as they were wild; he swore bitterly when he strove for salvation in a clench and found his great arms empty.

It was a wholly one-sided battle, a battle so easy for Tifton that he wondered why he had not brought it on before. Then he started his man to back-stepping dizzily, following up closely with blows that bit and cut and stung—and Bud Ashley broke and ran blindly, unsteadily, for the laurels!

Ten-Spot Tifton had won back his own.

He stood panting, and watched Ashley until the kindly laurels swallowed him from view. Then he turned to the crowd of gaping onlookers and smiled triumphantly.

"While I'm about it," said he, "I'll straighten everything out. If anybody here thinks I stole that two-dollar watch, let him step forward and be made to see different."

But nobody came forward except to shake his battered and bruised and bleeding hands. Again was he the champion, the favorite. Finally he pushed his way through that circular phalanx of solid friends, and went, the very proudest and happiest man in the world, to look for Mary Ellen.

She wasn't in the boarding-house. He went to Mrs. Fanning with a question.

"I reckon you'll find her a little ways up on the side o' the west mountain," said Mrs. Fanning. "She went up there to watch the fight."

And up there he found her. She was standing beside a giant hemlock, and when she saw him coming she smiled a smile that was not much less than glorious. His woodman's eyes saw the two little patches of hemlock needles that were sticking to her apron, even with her knees, and his heart read the sign aright. He knew that, while he had been fighting, she had been asking the aid of the Big Friend of homeless women. His throat suddenly became tight. One of his forefingers straightened toward her knees.

"I was doin' my part, Ten-Spot," she told him a little brokenly, "like you was doin' yours—just as hard as I could."

He put out his arms to her.

"Mary Ellen," he said, "come here."

Among Bud Ashley's effects they found a pair of big, buckskin gloves, and one of them was noticeably heavy. In that glove, the shape of which had been somewhat altered, they found an unlawful weapon, a set of brass knucks; and then they knew more about the wonderful knockout blow of Bud Ashley's.

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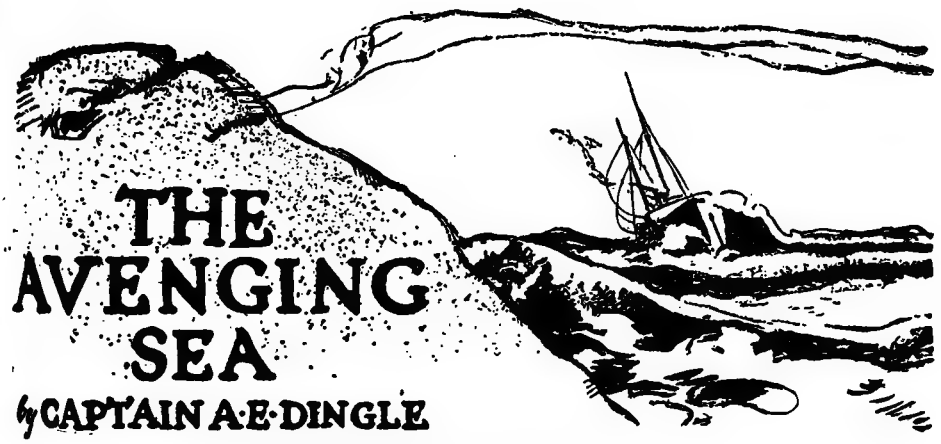

THE AVENGING SEA

by CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE

Author of "Blind Luck of St. Paul," "Deferred," etc.

THE sea has its moods: benign, soft-bosomed, tender; harsh, implacable, terrible; clean always, and of wondrous impartiality in its justice. And the men who go down to the sea in ships must sooner or later absorb the cleanly qualities of their mistress, or ingloriously quit her service. Most of them prove worthy of her.

But harpies and ghouls are numbered among the toilers of the sea, and for a time they may grin in the teeth of Old Ocean and flout him as they glean their horrible harvest. They are the wreckers—lurking jackals, feeding on trapped lions of the sea. Like the jackal, too, they sometimes fail to escape the down-sweeping blow that crushes them.

There is a barren spot on the bleak coast of Cornwall, where ships bound for Bristol from the southward make their landfall, and an untended gas beacon on an outlying rock marks the turning-point. One mile north of the light the course may be altered with safety. Once in six weeks a beacon-tender replenishes the gas cylinders that feed the light; between visits the beacon stands a lonely watch, winking a single warning eye unceasingly.

Two miles south stands a steep-faced mass of granite, its shoreward side running down gradually to a ridge of reef that may be crossed on foot at low tide; and the stretch of coast intervening between the light and the bold rock promises scant mercy to mariners in fair weather; in bad weather, none.

On the granite hummock crouched a driftwood shanty, hidden from observation from shore or seaward, its weather-beaten timbers the color of the rock itself, seeming in its very attitude to be cringing in shame at its ghastly purpose. Inside seven people were huddled about a small wood fire, and the fumes of strong tobacco intensified the growing murk of evening. Of human form, five of the seven had nothing else of human attributes. Doré or Hogarth might well have designed them.

Furtive, beetle-browed, cruel of lip, talon-clawed—devils incarnate. And one was a woman. Of the other two, one was roughly bound to the center post of the hut; the second, a sturdy, open-faced man with an incongruous scowl on his countenance, sat in the low doorway, gloomily staring seaward at the banked-up clouds on the darkening horizon. A moan of dire discomfort burst from the bound man, and the woman cried shrilly—

"Be quiet, you puppy, if you don't want yer neck slit!"

She puffed furiously at her pipe, and declaimed to the others in general:

"I tell you that kid'll be the finish of us if you keep him. Have you all gone crazy, that you keep a living witness against us? Croak him and dump him before he gets us all hung, I say. Here, I'll do it myself, if you're scared!"

The harridan started to her feet, the personification of malignity, and the man in the doorway looked back at her with a low growl. But a hand reached out and clutched the woman in a grip like death, and her arrester snarled:

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"Leave him be, or I'll crack yer sconce with a rock! He says he's got money, don't he? Then he stays here until he makes good or I find out he's bluffing. Ain't it just as easy to shunt him off then as now? Let him be. He's harmless."

The woman subsided, muttering, but she was not alone in her views. Other voices grumbled:

"Dead 'uns is safe, say I."

"He's the first you let slip in out o' four wrecks."

"What if he has got money! We'll get pinched if we tries to get any of it. Better stick to business, and get our money sellin' goods."

"Selling goods, you sheep," the leader burst out. "How much have we got out of the cargoes o' four coasters? Not enough to fill the old girl's stocking! Sailors ain't worth saving, that I know; but d'ye think when a passenger chances along I'm going to let him slip without squeezin' him?

"Didn't he offer me a thousand dollars to save him, after I shoved him back the first time? and didn't he offer five thousand on his dyin' oath before I pulled him in? I'll see that he don't squeal on us—after he's produced the stuff. Quit weepin', and keep yer eyes open to the suth'ard; it's goin' to settle down thick tonight."

The objectors were partially silenced. Yet while they kept a lookout for more prey they simmered with the sullenly expressed fear that "Blink" Coombs was becoming far too ambitious. Hitherto their exploits had been confined to small cargo vessels, with small crews, who could be conveniently knocked on the head in the remote event of their reaching the rocks with sufficient life left in them to struggle to preserve it, and cargoes not too bulky to be easily salvaged and handled in the narrow space afforded by the granite hummock.

Association with crooked merchants ashore on the mainland made the disposal of such cargoes a simple matter, assuming on the part of the wreckers a willingness to dispense with haggling over prices.

By means of a seaward hood on the beacon, fitted on the approach of evening when the weather threatened thick, and not to be detected by prying eyes on the distant shore, and the placing of a similar light on the summit of the granite hummock, as carefully concealed from shoreward, four unlucky vessels had been successfully lured into a change of course two miles too far to the southward and inevitable catastrophe on the merciless coast.

Three ships came, bringing death to their crews and profit to their murderers with no chance of the affair becoming known. Adroitly dodging the periodical visit of the light-tender by utilizing the few days before and after for the disposal of the plundered cargoes, the wreckers waxed confident until the ensnaring of the fourth vessel.

THEN it was that Blink Coombs departed from his usual custom and permitted one sorely battered victim to live. The man's clothes were not discernable in the darkness, but his desperately offered reward of much money for his life had been too much for Blink's cupidity. Daylight the next day revealed the man in the light of a passenger, and his identification by means of water-soaked papers definitely aroused the wrecker's curiosity. He was permitted to live, a prisoner, until the next trip to the mainland.

Among themselves, the evil crew believed that the case was simply one of a murder deferred, but the fact of a living witness at all rendered them uneasy; and their uneasiness was not lessened by the rising ambition of their leader. He had announced that they would try for big game just once, and clear out with fat gains. Just once, he said, they would set the trap for a passenger steamer, and there would be pickings that even the old girl would chuckle over.

Hence the atmosphere of foreboding that brooded over the gang. It was very well to say that after the event they would cut and run for it; but out of the fated steamer's many scores of people, it was unthinkable that some at least would not get clear to hunt down the wreckers.

The sturdy fellow who had sat apart from the rest in the shack, now sat apart from them on watch, and he muttered to himself continually. Joe Logan had dabbled in the dirty business at first while the liquor was in him, and remained in it simply out of desperation. The threats of his unsavory fellows convinced him that it was a matter of sink or swim with him now.

They would see to it that he did not desert the crew. Their own safety demanded that. So, while one of them perforce, he did his part and kept as keen a lookout as any of them. He it was who now detected,

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under a black cloud in the last glow of a stormy sunset, a sail leaning to the stress of the gale she was bringing up with her.

"Here's a meal for ye, you howlin' wolves!" he shouted, springing to his feet.

He flung an arm in the direction of the sail, then departed to perform his duty.

While the sea jackals busied themselves with their preparations, Logan took the only boat and put off for the beacon, two miles away, to fit the seaward hood on the instant that the false light sent its sinister invitation across the tumbling waters. The preparations were few, and quickly completed. A staff erected on the rocky head carried a lantern, which was fitted with a crude contrivance of wheels and weights that kept the light revolving in close imitation of the beacon.

The two lights winked in unison for a brief space, then the beacon light vanished, and while waiting for Logan's return in the sailing dory, the human vultures crouched in their filthy nest chuckling in anticipation of the coming feast. Lize Crag, the woman of the gang, showed her mettle now. Out from the shack she came staggering, bearing a bundle of short, heavy clubs. These she handed around, and with each one she gave her hideous blessing.

"There, Blink dear," she gritted, her wrinkled, featureless face a-work with fiendish relish, "there's your baby, my man. Do you mind the old fellow last time? Hah! that bit o' wood fitted his skull like a cap!"

The others laughed harshly at her chattering, but they took her offering with a furtive glance at her glinting eyes and curveless mouth as if on guard less she carry her admonitions to the point of illustration. The younger of them shivered when the distribution was finished, and Lize crouched in her own cranny, her evil old face working spasmodically as she fondled her own heavy staff and crooned to it like a real woman croons to her child.

It was pitch dark now, and the incoming sea sighed and sobbed about the rocky fangs. At increasingly frequent intervals a smooth hillock of gray water surged silently up the face of the granite hummock, to suddenly announce its arrival and leashed power by hurling its broken crest hissing among the wreckers' feet. In the southeast quadrant a faint, bobbing red light low down on the sea proclaimed the fated vessel to be a small sailing craft on the starboard tack, too small to carry her port side light at a widely visible height.

"Small pickin's in her! She's a Spainer," muttered Coombs, peering into the murk.

"Hah! You and your whining!" snarled the woman, viciously. "She's big enough to pay dividends on our capital, ain't she? Little fish are sweet, I say."

The talon-like fingers writhed about the heavy staff she carried, and her evil face was contorted with inhuman greed.

Logan ran his dory up to the lee of the rock and made her fast, then joined the crew watching the vessel now almost abreast. He was wet through, and breathing with difficulty, for the two miles of dark sea he had traversed had tried his small craft to her limit. He crouched over the wood fire in the hut to warm his chilled hands, and his eyes keenly scanned the figure of the young man bound to the post.

Already the great combers rolling in from deep water hammered at the rock with a force that shook the hut to the fastenings, and Joe Logan, in a sudden access of returning manhood, drew out his big knife to cut the lashings, and free the prisoner. He knew that all hands would be busy once the ship struck, and he knew as well that it was by no means impossible that a great sea might sweep the shanty away in bits.

He would like to give the young fellow a chance, anyway. But while he hesitated his name was called, and he hurried out.

"Stand by!" snarled Coombs, giving him an evil look, for he had seen Logan's intent. "She's altered her course. She'll hit right inside here in fifteen minutes."

Every ghoulish visage was set toward the blur which white foam at the waterline showed was the ship. Nearer she plunged, until the hammering of the seas could be heard at her wooden sides, and the shrill chirrup of straining tackles sounded like voices of the night. And two miles away, back along the track she had traversed, the false light winked sneeringly.

PRESENTLY voices might be heard on board the vessel, as a keen eye detected something amiss. She was almost among the fangs of rock waiting to tear her, and now the voices rose to shouts of alarm. But the evil was done. She surged forward on the top of a long roller, her forefoot struck heavily, she seemed to stagger to a halt, then came on

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again, swung broadside to the land, and another tremendous comber hurled her on her beam-ends among the breakers.

In the hurly-burly of noise that ensued, a shriek went up; a woman's shriek. It was smothered suddenly, as if she who uttered it was overwhelmed. Then only the crashing of timbers was heard to mingle with the roar of the waters; and on the rocks ran dark figures, every face bent to scan the incoming débris for living men who must not live longer.

"There's one—get him!" howled the witch-like old woman, darting waist-deep into the froth and bringing her club down with a horrid crunch on a bobbing head.

Her fellow harpies were as busy as she. Logan alone found means to miss a victim. This part of the terrible trade sickened him; if his club ever fell, it fell on floating wreckage; and the others were too intent upon their own performances to keep a tally on him. They knew that he was powerless to quit them now. Whether he killed or not, his fate would be the same as theirs if the gang ever came to justice.

But Joe Logan had heard that woman's despairing cry, and with grim resolve he kept close watch over what his fellows were doing. He looked vainly for a woman's floating form, and with a shudder he told himself that she perished with her cry.

Then, when the evil crew rested a while for lack of victims, and the catastrophe was apparently at an end, suddenly Lize Crag uttered a hungry snarl and dashed toward a piece of wreckage on which floated a small, white bundle that wailed weakly. Her skinny arm was raised, her awful club poised to strike, when Logan hurled himself upon her and gripped her arm savagely.

"Touch that and I'll beat your brains out!" he gritted, flinging the woman aside.

A licking sea swept Logan from his feet, but he had seized the small white bundle and held on to it tenaciously. Stubbornly fighting against the deadly undertow, he won back to the rock, and pushed the white bundle upward, gasping—

"Take the kid, Lize, until I get out."

The woman grinned with fury. Her lust for murder had been but whetted. She snatched the little one from Logan's hands, and snarled like a beast as she pitched it back into the sea. The rest of the ghoulish mob were otherwise employed, and Logan and the woman were alone.

Blink Coombs had mounted to the pinnacle of the rock to secure a comprehensive view of sea and coast; his mates groped among the low rocks, quivering with anxiety lest one man remain alive from the vessel to rise against them after all.

Joe Logan painfully fought to regain his little prize, and now he climbed with one hand while holding on to the child with the other. Slowly he hauled himself up the rocks, keeping a wary eye on the hag hovering by; then he faced her and uncovered one end of the bundle. A little hand groped out, and a tiny cry wavered out upon the turmoil of wind and wave.

"Listen, Lize," he said, with emphasis, "you're a black-hearted fiend, like the rest, but you've got the form of a woman, and I suppose you was one, once. Now, I want this kid, alive, and you'll look after it for me until this night's work is done. Take it into the shack and warm it. If you do it, I'll give you my share in the divvy up; if anything happens to the little cuss, I'll take your skinny neck in my hands and let you croak by inches with your face close up to the kid's face. Get that?"

Mechanically Lize took the child, but her hideous features were convulsed with fury at her own complaisance. By a flash of grace, she was enabled to realize that Logan was capable of making good his promise, and his white, grim face bent close to her own sent a peremptory message direct to her atrophied brain.

Sullenly she entered the hut, and again the little cry wailed out; the little hand once more groped helplessly; but now the wail was changed to a comforted sob, for the tiny hand had touched the woman's withered neck, and the soft, cold fingers snuggled and thrust against that leathery bosom. There was something almost human in the snarl of surprise that escaped Lize Crag as she disappeared inside the shack.

Joe Logan hurried down to the boat, and prepared to complete his part of the night's work. The true beacon had to be uncovered now, and then, when the false light had been unrigged, the wreckers would set about collecting their scattered booty.

"Hold on with that boat," shouted Coombs. "Leave the lights as they are. There's a big steamer coming up. We'll make our big haul right now!"

A howl of half-hearted protest welled up from the wreckers. Not one among them

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but feared the result of their leader's soaring ambitions; not one of them had the backbone to back his objections with action. Their muttered protests changed to mutual expressions of fear at the outcome, and trembling surmises as to what they were to do with the people of a huge steamship.

Logan stopped at the boat in blank puzzlement. In all of the wrecker's wild talk of snaring a big steamer, four-fifths of it had been put down as the boasting of a desperado; he never had believed that the coup would be tried. Now he stared long to seaward until he picked up the lights of the ship, and a wild desire, born of his newly found interest in the tiny atom of humanity he had snatched from the sea, came upon him to upset Coombs' villainous schemes. But how? The problem was a hard one.

SUDDENLY he thought of the prisoner. He stepped to the door of the hut, and marveled at the strange sounds he heard. Lize was uttering weird noises as she crouched over the child on her lap; noises which Logan gathered might have been crooning lullabys if emanating from any other female creature. Lize's efforts sounded the more weird by reason of the hollow booming of the fast rising sea, which slapped and occasionally thumped at the rearward walls of the cabin.

The narrow, uncertain causeway connecting the rock with the mainland was deep under water now; and even had it been bare, the sweeping combers surging shoreward must have rendered it impossible of foot passage. Logan passed by the woman, and stooped over the prisoner, whose eyes glittered brightly in the flickering firelight. The woman gave him no heed as he unfastened the young man's lashings.

"Can you sail a boat, sonny?" asked Joe in a hoarse whisper.

A roaring sea shook the hut to the fastenings, and water poured in through the timbers, washing out the fire.

"A little, but I'm not very strong," replied the prisoner. "If it's to get away from this nest of murderers I'll try, though."

"It's to save a steamer full of people," returned Joe.

"Then I can sail her."

Logan glanced dubiously at the woman. Every minute the rock was swept by the seas now, and he knew what a dory trip to the beacon would mean even for a skilled sailor. That the youth could make it he doubted, for all his willingness; yet the time was very short, if it was to be done at all. The steamer's lights were entirely visible now, and she was approaching at sickeningly fast speed.

He hesitated to go in the boat himself, and thus leave his little waif to the tender mercies of Lize; but it was unthinkable to take the child along; the chances of getting back were too slight. He made a test, with a lump in his throat meanwhile.

"Here, Lize, give me the kiddie," he demanded, seizing the child's wrappings.

"Let go," the woman hissed, a claw-like hand sinking its talons into Logan's wrist. "The kid's sleepin', and I dare you or the devil to wake her!"

"How about Blink and the rest?" Logan persisted. "They'll wake her up and heave her to the fish when they find out you've saved her."

"Let 'em try it!" spat Lize, viciously, and Joe was satisfied.

The child would have at least as good a chance with the savage old woman as with him in that frail dory.

"Come on, sonny, we'll get out," he said, gently kicking the young fellow in the side. "I'll go with you, for the job's a tough one."

Outside, the black shapes of the wreckers were grouped around Blink Coombs, and all gazed excitedly at the oncoming steamer, now rapidly nearing the point where stood the blinded true beacon. Unperceived, Logan and his companion stepped the dory's mast, and pushed her down the lee side of the hummock. The heavy gale blew dead on shore, making a beam wind for the dory either way; but the seas were stupendous, and the dark stretch between them and their goal loomed up fearfully to Joe, clever sailor though he was.

He scanned his companion's white face; he saw no fear there, but a resolve that rose superior to mere physical defects. The boat poised dizzily on the crest of a sea, half-filled, then took the full blast of the wind in her scrap of spritsail, and darted into the blackness.

HALF an hour passed, and the steamer was almost abeam. Resplendent with many lights, the sight of her fascinated the harpies awaiting her, and it was not until she was about to alter her course that the leader aroused himself.

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Then he missed Logan and the woman.

"Where's Joe?" he howled furiously. "Fetch him out, one o' you, and the old girl, too. Here's work for all hands!"

A man ran inside the hut, groped around in the darkness for a moment, then took out his waterproof match-box and struck a light, for the fire had long been washed out. The flickering match light fell upon the witch-like head of Lize, and her eyes blazed like twin coals as she fiercely bade the man keep silent.

A gust of chill wind burst in and extinguished the match; but before it went out, the man had seen two vital things: the absence of the prisoner, and a gaping breach in the wall of the hut through which the hungry sea licked. He started out in an ecstasy of alarm, and was met by a bedlam of startled shouts from his fellows.

"What's that steamer doin'? Look! She's put about an' standin' down the coast again. What——"

"Damnation and blazes!" roared Coombs, flinging an arm to the southward. "Look at that! Where's that blarsted Joe Logan?"

Every eye followed the outflung hand, and a roar went up as the blackness of the storm was stabbed by the regular flash of the true beacon.

"Now we've lost her," howled the wrecker wildly. "'Course she stands off when she sees two lights here. Get out th' way till I tear the heart out o' Logan, the dog."

But Logan was not to be found. Coombs discovered the absence of his captive, but it made little impression upon him. He saw the half-demolished hut—saw, too, the huddled figure of the old woman—but he gave the material damage scant attention; he failed to notice the attitude of Lize, the fiercest wrecker of them all. He ran out to the little cranny in the rocks where the dory should be, and there he found his mates looking blankly at the empty berth.

"Logan's gone back on us, and he's taken the pup with him," ejaculated Coombs, with a fearful oath. He darted back to the hut like one demented, to rave at Lize for keeping slovenly guard. But he drew back in amazement at her reception of his ravings. Out of the gloom flew a sharp rock, and the curse that came with it curdled the wrecker's blood.

"Keep away from me!" she spat at him, keeping her voice low, but injecting untold venom into the tones. "Get out, and do yer dirty job, an' leave me an' the kid be," she advised him.

"All right, old girl," he retorted, backing out. "There ain't no dirty job this night, thanks to you lettin' them two sweeps get clear. But you'd better get outside, Lize, for this old shack is falling to bits, and the sea's rising like I never saw it before."

The wrecker rejoined his fellows, and together they watched and discussed the steamer and the beacon that had thwarted their foul plans. The beacon winked rhythmically, keeping perfect time with the false light; and the steamer was almost out of sight beyond the true beacon again.

"Oh, well, fellers, it's only a job spoiled," Blink tried to assure his mates. "I ain't envying Joe out in the dory. And there'll be plenty o' steamers along this way before the light tender buzzes around again."

"Huh, that's what you say," growled a voice in the darkness. "S'pose it's all right and the steamer don't hang around to see what's wrong with them lights, our boat's gone, ain't it? and how the —— are we to get clear o' here, if the sea keeps on risin'? Water's two foot higher'n high mark now. Your blarsted big notions scared Joe Logan off, and now he's queered us all!"

"You —— croaker!" roared the wrecker, hurling himself bodily toward the voice. "Where are you? I'll put you——"

"Yes, he's right, consarn you!" rejoined another voice. "You an' yer big scoops. Instid o' trying to bully out of it, yuh'd better git busy and find some way o' gittin' us ashore afore the wust comes."

A staggering mountain of foaming water seethed over the rock, licking up to the men's knees, and a crash from the shanty drowned the shrill shriek of Lize Crag.

"My ——, there goes the cabin," howled a shivering ruffian. Panic seized him, and he tore through the mob and fastened upon Coombs. His example was followed by the fear-crazed wreckers, and the greatest scoundrel of them all found himself beset in the darkness by overwhelming foes.

Up and down the slippery rock the men fought, snarling like wolves, biting, tearing, and kicking, three men hungry for the life of the fourth; the fourth of stubborn mettle, as determined as they. So they swayed and surged, while the sea climbed the steep sides of the rocky face, and poured about their legs with ever gaining force.

Coombs was forced to his knees by sheer

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weight of numbers, and three pairs of claws seized upon his throat and shoulders to dash his life out against the granite. One man rose to his feet to change his grip lower down, and a sea reached up for him and took him screaming into the night.

With a tremendous effort, Blink shook off his foes, staggered to his feet, and dashed toward the wrecked shanty. He snatched up a piece of oak timber, and returned to the fight. At the crest of the hummock he met the maddened ruffians, and they readily gave him fresh battle. Again they swayed in a fighting, screaming mass to the water's edge. One man went over backward with a blow from Blink's club; then the survivor flew in under the next blow, and sunk his teeth into Coombs' neck.

"Let go, yuh dirty swine," panted the wrecker, stumbling to his knees and flailing with both fists at the tenacious head at his throat. The man kept his teeth fast, and Blink's breath began to grow painfully short. Dimly he noticed the lights of the steamer. She was returning. Then the glistening head of a three-thousand-mile Altantic grayback roared over the hummock, and the fight was done.

When it passed two great timbers remained of the shack, jammed immovably into the rocky crevice; but for them, the great rock was bare.

THE NEXT morning, as soon as day dawned, the steamer stood in close to the beacon and took therefrom two marooned and chilled men clinging to it. Joe Logan's dory had been smashed in coming alongside the beacon in the night, and the two men she carried were sorely put to it to hang on until daylight. But they had torn away the wreckers' blind, and permitted the light to flash its warning through the dark hours.

Joe had seen with a shudder that the vessel was a warship, and he soon learned that she was going to remain on the spot until she cleared up the mystery of the two lights where only one should be. A commercial steamer would probably have thanked her stars for her escape, and gone about her voyage. But now, in the dawn, a boat was lowered off the hummock, and Joe Logan and his young companion went with the officer to seek the wreckers.

Their story had been told to the commander, and it was certain that Joe need not fear the result of any proceedings. His service at the beacon would go far in his favor; and besides, the young fellow who had helped him told something of the little waif who had been rescued from the sea.

"I'm afraid your little castaway is gone, Logan," remarked the officer seriously, scanning the two gaunt timbers which alone remained of the hut. "Sea's swept the rock clean, apparently."

They landed, and the crew scattered to search for signs of the wreckers. Joe accompanied the officer toward the two solitary timbers, and his bronzed face was full of an awful sorrow. Whether old Lize had proved true or false to her trust, it made no difference now. The sea had wiped the slate clean. Innocent and guilty had gone together. Joe's throat felt choky as he stumbled around the timbers.

"Here, Logan!" called the officer.

Joe hurried around to the other side, and a shout of pure relief burst from his breast. The officer was bending down to look under the angle formed by the jammed timbers, and on his official countenance was a human smile. As Joe came up, a tiny voice cried out from the crevice, and Logan saw then that the officer's forefinger was imprisoned in a tiny fist.

"Come here, all hands," roared Logan, taking the officer's prerogative and giving the order. "Shift this timber, gently now."

Eight sturdy seamen raised the heavy wood, and then the truth came out. Crushed to a shapeless mass by the merciless oak, Lize Crag, lay in the intersection of the timbers. But, in receiving her own deathblow, she had made a soft recess of her old body wherein the helpless waif had lain and slept through the elemental turmoil.

"Poor old girl," muttered the officer, tenderly lifting the child out. "She doesn't look much, does she? But there, all women are alike, I suppose, eh Logan?"

Joe reached out for the child and snuggled it in his arms with uncouth reverence.

"Let me have the kid, sir," he said. "I found her, and want to look after her until I can find some people who belong to her. But, poor old Lize!" he muttered, gazing down at the crooked, withered form, and the twisted, unlovely face that had acquired a tinge of nobility in death.

"It took Death to make a woman out of old Lize," he said, half to the cooing babe in his arms, "Death—and a little kid."

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HIS DECENNIAL CURSE

by THEODORE SEIXAS SOLOMONS

Author of "He Smile, He Go to Sleep."

A MAN was strolling up and down the short business street of Sapphire City, Alaska, enjoying a complete monopoly of it. Enjoying is the word; for though alone he was anything but lonesome. He caroled various lays—hymns, patriotic songs, ragtime and sentimental ditties.

He enjoyed, too, a monopoly of sound as complete as his monopoly of space; for, except for his singing, Sapphire City was as silent as the proverbial grave. Yet it would be rash to infer that this little mining village on the Arctic coast was deserted. No; at least sixty men and a baker's dozen women would gladly have walked about the street attending to their affairs, or loafed in front of the four stores and three saloons sniffing the lovely air of the late Spring afternoon. Under ordinary circumstances, that is.

Under the present circumstances they seemed to prefer to huddle in the rear of buildings, kneel under tables or crouch back of bars. The more adventurous squatted beneath the front windows, occasionally raising their eyes above the level of the sills for a furtive peek at the strolling vocalist.

It was not his music alone—fearful as that was—that had struck terror to all hearts. It was the fact that carelessly cradled in the arm of the monopolist was a rifle that, well named automatic, seemed to be discharging itself every little while at the upper façades of the buildings that lined the street.

Only when the weapon became silent did it appear to attract the slightest attention from the handsome, athletic-looking man who bore it. Then, drawing one of his six-guns and placing it in his teeth, he proceeded to recharge his rifle magazines from a well-filled cartridge-belt.

He was a monologist as well as a soloist.

"Come on and take m' li'l poppers off er-me," he would shout. "Come on, you men that ain't afraid ter die. Well, whoop! What d'ye know 'bout that. Gosh, 'szat right—not airy man in whole camp? Bunch white livers, every one of yer!"

Plainly the thing to do was to send for the peace-officer. Where, in Heaven's name, was the marshal? Was he in town?

He was. He was giving his fellow-citizens every possible proof, both ocular and aural that their peace-officer was in town. He was patrolling its main street. Yet it could hardly be said that he was keeping the peace!

In the Sapphire Palace eleven men were marooned, not including the daring Eskimo youth at the window.

"He go by now," the boy would excitedly announce.

Then the eleven men in the rear of the resort would troop to the window and watch the receding back of the man who owned the street. When he turned at the end of his short beat they sauntered back to cover.

Young Olaus Lund, at a moment of comparative safety, stuck his head out of the door to observe the official's movements, which maneuver evoked the following scalding rebuke from "Split" Murphy, the proprietor of the Palace.

"Now you fool Swede, you keep your snout indoor or get out altogether. If Tyler catches you rubberin' at him that drunk maniac is going to take a pot-shot in here and hit one of us men. Oh, hullo, Judge."

The last remark was addressed to his honor, Judge Keppler, who had bolted in at the back door, his hat pulled down, his coat collar turned up, apparently to shield himself from a "rain" of bullets. The

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distance from the rear of his office was about twenty feet. He was a very young man, but exceedingly dignified. He possessed spectacles and a slight knowledge of the code of Alaska.

The migratory eleven promptly surrounded him. "What are you going to do?" they asked.

"What am *I* going to do?" he exclaimed in a petulant tone, "Why, I'm merely the judiciary branch of the Government. If I made any arrests I'd be exceeding my authority."

"And you aim to keep right inside your authority, hey?" inquired Saul Cathcart, dryly.

Judge Keppler's earnest expression relaxed into a grin.

"You can bet your life I do," he declared fervently. "Making arrests is his job. He's the peace-officer."

"Looks it, don't he," remarked Patty Patterson sententiously, as the marshal passed the window bristling with firearms and calling stridently for "a man to perforate."

"As for his arresting himself," pursued Cathcart reflectively, "I got a pitcher of him leading himself by the ear before the J. P. of this burg—the way he feels right now! Say, Judge——"

"Judge nothing!" interrupted Keppler irascibly. "I ain't in my office now." Then he asked in a querulous voice, "What's the matter with him anyhow, boys? Is he drunk or crazy?"

Six of the eleven were of the opinion that the United States deputy marshal was crazy.

"I guess we'd all say drunk, Judge," explained "Lop-eared" Lansom, "if it wasn't for the fact that there ain't no one in Alaska has a better reppitation for truth, honesty and sobriety than that there same Dick Tyler. I've knowed him for seben or eight years here and on the Yukon and I never heared tell of him breaking loose that a-way. Listen to him!"

It was difficult not to. For the marshal's voice, though no longer musical, was loudly mandatory as he called once more for a man to bore.

"And I'll give yer m' solemn promise I'll percolate him—giv'm a diameter all right. Then mebbe I'll feel better and quit."

"What makes the thing so skittish," resumed Lansom, "is the fact that Dick Tyler was never knowed to break his word. And we all know what kind of a sightin' eye he's got."

"This is an awful reflection on the law and order of my district," complained Keppler bitterly. "Can't any of you huskies do something? Who's got a gun?"

Arctic Alaska being of a rather peaceable disposition, a canvass of the firearm situation failed to disclose a single weapon except the ancient short-barreled 44 in the drawer of the bar. As a means of intimidating Marshal Tyler, with his modern arsenal, this obsolete "bulldog" created no enthusiasm whatever. As Split Murphy phrased it, Tyler had been a good old scout, the friend of all, and who wanted to insult him with a thingumbob like that.

"Look out!" cried the Eskimo boy shrilly, and simultaneously with the crack of the automatic, splinters fell, and daylight filtered suddenly through a ragged hole in the gabled front of the Sapphire Palace.

"Gee, dis vos fierce," exclaimed little Cap Pugnitz, stroking his long, fiery mustache. "Vosn't dere no son-of-a-kun in town——"

WITH a bang the back door opened to the hurtling form of Tommy Crocker. He, too, had turned up his coat collar. Tommy was Tyler's general factotum at the jail.

"Say, judge," he panted, "Jack Ogilvie is awful annoyed. He gimme ten dollars to duck over here and tell you he can't stand it no longer, and if you gentlemen is riled too, if you won't please come right over and see him."

The conclave received this singular message with puzzled amusement.

Four days before Lop-eared Lansom and Jeff Pidginton had brought Ogilvie in from Eureka Creek, where he had been caught, locked in a death grip with "Fourflush" Riley on Thirteen-Below Discovery. Riley was dead, and there was little virtue in Ogilvie's admission that he had stabbed him, since Ogilvie's hand still held the knife. There was no weapon on Riley, but under the pillow in his bunk, close by, was a loaded revolver.

Ogilvie was a newcomer on Eureka, Pidginton had reported, and little was known of him, while Fourflush had been long and painfully known in the Arctic camps. Keppler, as committing magistrate,

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had entered Ogilvie's plea of self-defense and held the man to answer for murder before the District Court at Nome, whither Tyler would shortly take him on the first boat.

Meantime he languished in jail, in Tyler's custody, and was fed the loathsome concoctions of Tommy Crocker who was never intended by nature to tamper with uncooked food.

"What's peeving the prisoner?" asked Keppler sarcastically. "Is Tyler interfering with his afternoon siesta?"

"Guess so," replied Tommy. "Anyhow, says it makes him nervous."

"—— you say! Well at that he's got nothing on the rest of us," confessed Patty Patterson.

"Oh well, let's duck over anyway, Judge," suggested Lansom. "Tyler's office in the jail is about our only chance to get a real weapon. He generally has a few extry gats laying around."

"Yes, let's go," agreed Pidginton, "and if nothing more useful kin be done, anyhow we could mebbe rock your murderer to sleep."

A self-appointed delegation, headed by the youthful magistrate, waited their chance and ran the two hundred yards across lots to the rear door of the jail, whence they were immediately conducted by Tommy Crocker to the cell of Jack Ogilvie.

The jail's star—and only—boarder was a lean, bronzed man of middle age who was sitting in an armchair, his lids half closing his eyes, the palms of his hands entirely closing his ears, and an expression of incredible injury on his face.

"What do you want, Ogilvie?" asked Keppler.

The prisoner, without moving, replied:

"Oh, I just wanted to know if you figured on executing me by making me listen to that catawallin' out there. 'Cause I thought I was entitled to some kind of a trial before bein' put to death."

"Oh, come now, you can't kick," remonstrated Pidginton. "He's got the hull goldurn town bottled up indoors, while you're in jail anyhow."

The injured air of the prisoner changed to one of surprise.

"Bottled up!' What for?"

"Don't you hear him shootin' and threatenin' to kill the first man that pokes his features out-of-doors? Are you deaf?"

Ogilvie put his hands to his ears again.

"Gawd, gents, I been prayin' to be."

"Well, now, my sensitive friend, what do you suggest that we do about it?" inquired Keppler.

"Oh, I dunno," replied the prisoner, lazily stretching. "Seems to me the most important thing to do would be to stuff a bandanna hank'chef in his mug, so's he couldn't make no more noise."

"You don't say," rejoined Keppler, sarcastically, "And who do you think would undertake to do the stuffing?"

"Oh, I should think most any half-way man—if you got sucher article 'round here."

"Meanin' by that insult some guy that's tired of life," interjected Split Murphy, grinning. "Well now, my criminal friend, there's no one in the Sapphire Palace that's chafin' any to slough off his coil. And in all the other saloons and stores they're keeping awful conservative, too. So I guess there's no half-way men—or whole-way suicides is what you mean—around here—unless you think you'd like to beat the hangman to yer."

"Sure," echoed several of the deputation derisively, "why don't you volunteer?"

The prisoner smiled brightly.

"Honest, gents," he said, "that walloper's got my goat so I'd like nothin' better than gagging him. Tain't his insultin' language to Sapphire City that peeves me none. No, that only finds an echo in my heart. But when a man scrambles 'The Star-Spangled Banner' and 'Home, Sweet Home' together, and flats 'em both—I was raised musical myself, boys, and it pretty near kills me. There he goes again!"

Ogilvie mopped his brow and shuddered as the hoarse voice of Tyler once more curdled the afternoon stillness. Three shots that followed, separated only by defiant yells, roused the deputation to action. The shots also brought back Tommy Crocker with the report that neither gun, pistol nor cartridge could be found in the marshal's office. At this discomforting intelligence, Judge Keppler turned sharply to the prisoner.

"Look here, Ogilvie, we can't waste time joshing with you. Something's got to be done. Now if you've got the slightest idea that you'd like to go up against that madman out there—perhaps you don't know Tyler. We've never seen him drunk before, but, drunk or sober, he's a man that does just what he says. And the fact is

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we've got no firearms you could fight him with, except an old——"

Ogilvie raised his hand deprecatingly.

"No sense, decency or fun stopping him with a bullet. He ain't a bad feller, only drunk—and flattin', which ought to be a capital crime, I'll admit. But it ain't—leastways in Alaska. All I'd aim to do is scare him a little. Just gimme that knife of mine, so's he won't think I'm foolin' none and I'll guarantee to make him eat outer my hand."

The deputation withdrew to consider Ogilvie's astounding proposal. While his words had seemed mere banter at first they were now satisfied that the man meant business—that he preferred to face a drunken man's rifle rather than a sober hangman's noose. They also decided that it would be sound public policy to make a deal with him, on the principle of any port in a storm. They therefore returned to the cell and accepted his offer.

"Go to it," said Keppler. "Gag him you may, but disarm him you must—that is, if you want your freedom as a reward for risking your life!"

The prisoner raised his eyebrows.

"Well, I hadn't thought of that, gents," he replied with engaging candor. "Where I come from a man would be ashamed to talk about riskin' his life just handlin' a common drunk and disorderly. But seein' as you sports feel that tragic about it, I reckon I would be entitled to be turned loose if I deliver the goods."

Lop-eared Lansom drew Keppler aside.

"Take my advice, young man," he whispered, "get a quit-claim from that lunatic before he bites the dust, to square you with the court at Nome, or it's manslaughter for us."

"I certainly will," promised Keppler. And he cleared his throat and proposed the final terms.

TWELVE men crept forward on hands and knees from the rear of the Sapphire Palace. When they reached the broad windows, twenty-four eyes ranged themselves along the lower edge of the glass. Opposite, in the Last Chance saloon, many others followed suit.

Marshal Tyler came lurching down the street, his hoarse, erratic singing interspersed with contemptuous recitative, when suddenly—

"Shut up!" came the imperious command in the rasping, growling tones one uses to a whining dog.

The marshal stood stock still. A man had slipped from the jail and was advancing rapidly toward him.

"That'll about do for you," ordered Ogilvie. "I'm just sick and tired of your noise."

"Well look who's here," exclaimed the man who had owned the street. "If it ain't little Jacky Jailbird, which m' brave feller-cit'zens sicin' on me. Killed one man—mebbe kin kill 'nother. I sure appreciate compliment."

Ogilvie had halted within fifty feet of the mocking peace officer, who had now thrown his rifle into his hands. The moment Tyler paused, Jack Ogilvie answered him:

"You poor mizrable drunken skunk," he began in an easy conversational voice, "no one would pay any attention to you in a man's town, exceptin' mebbe to kick you into the gutter to sleep it off. But I gotter admit you've struck terror to the gentle hearts of all these perfect ladies 'round here——"

"Perfect ladies's right, jailbird," concurred the marshal.

"Who are feedin' me grub, and——"

"Oh, I see. You figure on committin' suicide for yer board and lodgin' do yer?"

"Not on your life," roared Ogilvie, "You hurt me personal, you swine—you flat! And I'm agoin' to cut your heart out fer that—or your gizzard ruther. No being that had a heart would torture a hull town by singin' at it the way you sing. You animated bagpipe, you, do I carve you standin' or on your knees?"

Tyler covered him with his rifle.

"Jailbird," he thundered, "m' voice is m' proudest possession. Jus' by those slurrin' words of yours you make the duty of shootin' you a joyful privilege."

"Shoot, then," yelled Ogilvie.

He tore open his shirt with his left hand.

"——." He spat on the ground contemptuously. "Just as I thought—all you kin shoot off is your booze-burned bazoo—and now I'm acomin' to knife you."

He started slowly toward the marshal.

In the Palace every man felt his heart pounding.

"——, look at him!" breathed Keppler from the center of the row of kneeling spectators.

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"Some man," agreed Lop-eared Lansom.

But still greater courage the fellow showed presently.

"Don't drop your knife, murderer," hissed Tyler at the advancing man, "for there's where I get acquitted."

"So that's your game, you low-down rat," cooly retorted the man with the upraised knife, "self-defense if you pull the trigger. But you can't pull the trigger—there ain't enough man blood in you. No, not to save your cur carcass from being carved!"

As he drew steadily closer he continued to pour forth a stream of taunts and jibes that seemed to hold the other hypnotized, his gun leveled at Ogilvie's heart, his finger on the trigger—paralyzed. When fairly upon him, Ogilvie dropped his knife, sprang at the rifle, twisted it from the marshal's grasp and held it clubbed over Tyler's head."

"Unbelt," he demanded, and the marshal like one in a spell, unbuckled his revolver-belt and handed it to the man who was no longer a prisoner.

He was a magnet! From every building on both sides of the street liberated citizens flocked to him. Hoisted on the shoulders of two blonde giants, he was carried by the crowd into the judge's office. Split Murphy alone tarried, and when the street was clear he slouched furtively to the dismantled peace-officer and addressed him sorrowfully.

"You raised hell, Dick, and I'm glad it wasn't no red-eye from my bar that done it. Your tenure of office is about finished, I reckon, and if you take the long hike overland to Nome I'll see that the wife follows you on the first boat."

Tyler seemed perfectly sober now.

"Thanks Split," he murmured, looking away, "but I'll stay and take my medicine."

In the roomy cabin which served the double purpose of courtroom and recorder's office Jack Ogilvie was the center of an admiring throng, the cynosure of all eyes. In five magic minutes he had leaped from the ignominy of a felon to the glory of a king among men. They shook his hand, slapped his back and asked him if they raised many more like him where he hailed from? To all of which he was modest, as became a hero.

"It's my eye," was all he said.

And he gathered his few belongings and left town, slightly intoxicated from the many libations which were forced upon him.

A MEETING was immediately called by the leading spirits of outraged Sapphire City to consider the fate of their peace-officer, over which Judge Keppler was asked to preside.

"I suppose this isn't any star-chamber proceeding," declared the young magistrate, upon accepting the chair. "Therefore—where's the gentleman?"

"Here," said Tyler, quietly slipping forward through the crowd.

"The object of this meeting," announced the chairman, "is to decide what is to be done about Marshal—ahem—or Mr. Tyler, for the best interests of this camp. Should he be reported to the district court or—well, gentlemen, your opinions are now in order."

It was an awkward situation. Vast indignation was obviously appropriate to the occasion. But somehow, now that the ruction was all over, Tyler's fellow-townsmen didn't seem to feel it. In fact their reaction from the long strain would have tended toward levity if levity were not so clearly out of place.

Nevertheless, through even the more denunciatory speeches gleamed threads of jocose humor, aimed now at Sapphire's humiliated citizens, now at the most humiliated one of them all—Dick Tyler. Saul Cathcart hit the general sentiment when he summed up matters in these trenchant sentences:

"He sure made an awful ass of himself—begging your pardon, Dick—but he's served us well and faithful, and made other drunks, dust thieves and common criminals almighty scarce in this neck o' the woods. Now if we come down on him like the roof of a thawed-out drift, ain't we liable to go further and fare worse? If he can frame up any kind of a half-way plausible excuse for the way he cavorted 'round here today—well I say, let's hear it."

"Do you care to make a statement, Marshall—eh—Mr. Tyler?" asked the chair.

The disgraced deputy walked to the front with downcast eyes, and in a low voice delivered the following touching appeal:

"Judge and gentlemen: I have just two things I wish to say. The first is this—and before this assembly that knows me I hope it ain't necessary for me to state that it wasn't that feller's can-opener nor his eye that bothered me any, but it was his magnificent courage that got my respect and

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admiration, but not my goat. I didn't noways calculate to shoot anybody, anyhow. I was just hilarious and exalted and aimin' to enjoy an afternoon tea with myself.

"The second thing is something I've never mentioned to a soul, because I ain't proud of it. I labor under a curse even unto the third and fourth generation thereof. Every ten years regular I get off on one vast, colossal drunk—and my father and grandfather before me. Just once in ten years."

"Vell, py ——," ejaculated good-hearted Cap Pugnitz, "ain't dot ——."

Above the jumble of comments that echoed the captain's amazement Split Murphy's voice was heard.

"You must have lit up at home, Dick. 'Long Jim" and Connelly and me has compared notes and you never had a drop today in any saloon in town."

"Correct," admitted Tyler, contritely; "I wrestled with the demon in my own home and my shoulders sure kissed the mat."

The expressions of heartfelt sympathy that Tyler's confessions evoked soon culminated in cries of "Judgment!" "Judgment!" The chairman, whose pencil was flying back and forth over a big yellow pad, raised his left hand for silence. In a few moments he rose and said—

"How does this strike you, boys?"

"Whereas, United States Deputy Marshal Richard H. Tyler has this day become intoxicated, and by careless shooting and rude remarks has acted in an unseemly manner, but has heretofore been the efficient watchdog of this camp;

"And whereas, he has labored manfully against a hereditary decennial curse, whose next fell clutch upon him is not due till after these diggings will be worked out, the town deserted and his services no longer required;

"And whereas, nothing worse has today resulted than turning loose the nerviest man—barring Dick Tyler—that ever roared abusive language into the business end of an automatic rifle, thereby conclusively establishing his innocence of the cowardly crime of which he stood accused;

"And whereas, while this camp dislikes to knock the dead, yet the fact remains that the person he murdered would have died anyhow of chronic internal meanness;

"Now, therefore, if the said Tyler will well and truly pay or cause to be paid the carpenter's bill for plugging up the holes he shot in the façades of Main Street,

"It is hereby resolved: that we forget it!"

"Gentlemen, does that express the sense of this meeting?"

The response was a chorus of "You bet," "That's me" and "Sure, Mike." Nevertheless, at the suggestion of Jeff Pidginton, it was moved, seconded and carried that the resolutions be made unanimous.

"Boys," said the big culprit, blinking feelingly, "I thank you."

THEN he slipped away and took the hill trail to his cabin and Molly. He was not yet out of the woods. For though he had successfully weathered the miners' meeting he was now to stand before another and sterner tribunal. He was perfectly certain that Molly had been told the meaning of those shots, for there were at least eight women of the baker's dozen who would have braved many more bullets than he had turned loose that afternoon in order to carry to Molly the sad tidings of her husband's fall! His fears were fully justified, for he found the little woman saturated with angry tears.

"Now my dear," he began.

"Not a word," said Molly, stamping her pretty foot.

"Why, my darling——"

"Just to think," she sobbed, "after seven years to find I've married a drunkard, after all."

"But my love," he coaxed, "just listen a minute—please! I knew this fellow, Ogilvie, though the people 'round here don't know that. And he's not the kind that would kill any man except in self-defense. Now this Fourflush Riley had a gun almost in reaching distance, and Ogilvie, who was always gun-shy, was probably a-scared that——"

"Ogilvie a-scared of guns!" exclaimed Molly incredulously.

Tyler immediately changed the subject.

"Well, here was a friend of mine, in my own jail, up against a murder charge——"

Molly dabbed her eyes and looked intently at her husband.

"He was a friend of yours, was he!"

"A friend and then some," admitted Tyler. "He saved my life in the stormiest Winter ever known in the Sixty-mile country. And, as I say, though it was surely self-defense, yet the evidence was dead against him, poor devil—and it kind of preyed on

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my mind, till I just had to drown my sorrows—it would drive any man to drink, you know. But I promise, in future——"

With a piercing look again she cut him short.

"Dick Tyler, you come here."

Meekly he obeyed—unthinkingly.

She put her hands up on his shoulders, brought her face close to his and looked him steadily in the eye. She was not really interested in his eyes, however, but in his breath, which she carefully sniffed before he realized what she was doing. Then she pushed him away from her.

"Humph," she went. "Just that detestable pipe—not a trace of anything else!"

Tyler preserved a discreet silence while Molly, thinking hard, served their simple Alaskan supper. Then, with knife and fork poised, her brow suddenly unpuckered itself. The implements clattered to her plate, she placed her hands upon her plump hips, tilted her head a little sidewise, and laughed and laughed.

"Where is he now?" at length she asked, wiping the tears from her eyes, "This hero that disarmed Dick Tyler with his naked eye and a pocket-knife!"

"Oh, he'll be half-way to the Yukon by morning," replied the marshal. "He's a lightning striker at a cross-country mush."

Mrs. Tyler suddenly became grave.

"But of course we'll lose your job!" she exclaimed in consternation.

"N-o-o, guess not," assured Tyler, taking from her a brimming plate of beans. "They've had a meeting already. And when I explained that this thing happens only once every ten years with me——"

The dish swayed to his merriment.

"Look out," laughed Molly, "you'll spill the beans."

"No I won't," said her husband, setting the plate down carefully, "but you will," he added, raising a warning finger, "if you ever let anybody know that we never keep liquor in this house."

THE SONG OF THE WANDERER

by ED. L. CARSON

BRIGHT gleams the shining snow high on the mountain-tops,
Purple the passes and cañons between;
Dark is the wall where the precipice dizzy drops,
Here on the plain all is gracious and green;
Yet we pass on from this boundary so beautiful,
Wanderland, Wonderland, feed us our fill;
Gaily we glide away,
Recklessly ride away;
That which we seek lies just over the hill.

Where do we come from and where have we been before?
Ask of the breeze from the southwestern plains;
Ask of the arctic, where blustering blizzards roar.
Naught can we show but our scars for our pains.
Can we not linger where all seems to welcome us?
Trails never traveled are beckoning still;
Little horse, track along,
Little horse, shack along;
That which we seek lies just over the hill.

So through the world we are restlessly wandering,
Hearts never satisfied urging us on;
So pass the years we are carelessly squandering—
Life's little lamp glimmers once and is gone.
Is there no place where Contentment is waiting us?
Never we've found it nor ever we will;
Still we believe ourselves,
Still we deceive ourselves,
That which we seek lies just over the hill.

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A LEAK IN THE BIG DIPPER

by DOUGLAS S. WATSON

Author of "The Unmudding of the Empire," "At the Mercy of Bill Gunn."

PING!-ye-e-e-e-eh——

The wailing diminuendo brought Cranston instantly to his feet, rifle at the shoulder. His aim steadied; his mark was a dimly seen form bending suspiciously over a riffle-box in one of the sluices that carried gold-laden water and gravel from the crusher of the Big Dipper mine, whose faintly lighted and scattered buildings clung, lichen-like, to the steep north bank above the boulder-strewn course of Skunk Creek.

Rountree, more cautious, peered, crouching, from behind a slate reef projecting from the stream-bed.

"Hi, you! What you doing there!" shouted Cranston, running forward and lessening the distance between himself and the man who had fired, to a bare twenty yards.

"I thought it was——"

"What's that riffle-box open for?" demanded Cranston angrily. "Brick, we've caught him in the act!" he called back.

Rountree hastened to his side.

"It's 'Nosey' Belcher!" he exclaimed. "Robbing the boxes, eh?" he accused with contempt. "Taking advantage of your job of night engineer, eh? If the boss's son and I hadn't tried to follow a brown bear's trail up the ridge this afternoon and lost our way, you'd have gotten away with it, eh?"

"He's got a key to the padlocks!" noted Cranston shrilly.

"Of course I have! I was replacing quicksilver," blustered Belcher. "Maxwell told me to do it. He gave me the key!"

"And you turned off the electric lights so you could see better!" snapped Cranston. "Nosey, we've caught you red-handed!"

"And what did you fire at us for?" barked Rountree belligerently.

"Hey! What's all the row down there?"

Maxwell's bellowed hail saved Belcher the immediate necessity of answering Rountree. Instead, he called up to the superintendent.

"I was replacing quicksilver, Max! I saw two men crawling over the boulders. Thought they were amalgam thieves. It's only young Cranston and 'Brick' Rountree."

"That doesn't explain why the lights are out," Cranston reminded him sharply.

"They want to know why the lights are out!" shouted Belcher. "The fuse blew out," he added, and, dropping the heavy box lid, reset the hasp.

A click, and the padlock was in place.

As the three made their way to the engine-room they saw Maxwell's lean form pass the lighted windows. A moment later a dozen electric lamps glowed dimly among the scattered sluices.

"It was a fuse, all right," was the superintendent's greeting as Cranston led the way into the building.

Rountree grinned sardonically.

"Is it usual to replace quicksilver at night?" asked Cranston, meaningly.

"Belcher has orders to do it whenever he has time," said Maxwell.

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The explanation brought forth an unsatisfied "Oh" from Cranston, and he winked knowingly at Rountree.

A HOT July day with its dazzling sunlight shimmered about the red-painted mine buildings; below them, the cold clear water of the creek, rushing down from the Sierras' melting snows, gurgled over its slaty bed. The roar of the crusher droned through the stream's arching cottonwoods, fading as it rose among the silvery-blue foliage of the surrounding bull-pines toward the massed forests of deeper-hued conifers ranked upon the successive ridges, flanking the granite, snow-covered summits in the east.

A heavily laden lumber wagon with its trailer clanked and clattered along the dusty road snaking down the mountainside from Holley's mill high up the opposite ridge.

Burrell Cranston lay full length beneath a pine clump, wondering when the eight mules would get their burden into town. Three miles down-stream was the Junction; a roadhouse and store, built at the fork where Skunk Creek tumbled into the south branch of the Middle American River. From here a road led eastward to the Jupiter, Ruddy Gulch and Golden Bow mines, a group of buried ancient river deposits, all on the same lead as the Big Dipper, but worked from the north side of the intervening ridge. From Junction to Arkansas Hill was six miles, while from that little mining center fifteen more miles of dusty road remained before the railroad was reached at Colfax.

From his speculation about the mules Cranston's mind drifted to the episode of the previous evening; from that to his present situation and the reason for his being in the mountains.

Failure to pass examinations at the end of the Spring semester had brought a request from the college authorities that he remain away for a six-month period. He had been compelled to face his father with this intelligence.

"So you've failed, have you? Failed at the end of your Junior year?" William Cranston's lean, angular, but more aged, duplicate of his son's form bent stiffly as he spoke caustically. "No excuses, please! It's bad enough as it is! You'll spend those six months at the Big Dipper! You'll go to work. I won't even put you on the pay-roll. When you think you can make yourself useful, let me know. Frankly, I'm disgusted with you! If you don't put in all your time tramping the mountains with a gun, you may find time to do a little studying. And to think that I planned to put you in charge of the Big Dipper!" the father had wound up bitterly.

Burrell Cranston winced even at the recollection. His conscience pricked him; he had been at the mine four weeks and not once had he opened a book. Instead whenever Brick Rountree, former Nevada cattle-puncher, now mine teamster, could spare time the two had wandered forth with their guns.

SOUNDS of earnest conversation rose above the murmurs of the creek and the confused roar from the crusher. Cranston listened. His attentive ear brought coherence; rendered intelligible the mumble of human voices.

"You're chicken-hearted, Max. I tell you it's the easiest thing in the world! Take the case of the Golden Bow."

"That's just the trouble with your scheme; the robbery kicked up an awful fuss."

"They never caught the fellows, did they?"

"N—o."

"Then why shouldn't we play the trick? Everybody'll think the same gang did it."

Cranston's heart leaped. He crawled toward the brush overhanging the stream bank and peered through. Upon a boulder below him sat Maxwell and Belcher.

"This riffle-box business is a piker's game, Max. Why not make a real haul? We can blame it on that gang that held up the Golden Bow. When do you clean up?"

"Day after tomorrow," acknowledged Maxwell.

"I'll fix the boys," offered Belcher, rising. "Say—that young fool Cranston nearly had us last night, Max," he laughed.

Cranston lost the reply, for the two were retracing their steps. He watched them gain the mine buildings, then rose, white with anger—anger against his father's lack of confidence in him was not least among the surges that caused him to set his jaws—and, circling the hill, made for the barn.

Rountree was hitching the team to the light spring wagon.

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"Where are you bound, Brick?" Cranston called.

"Arkansas Hill and the railroad," was the laconic reply.

"Supplies?"

"Yep. Want to go?"

"Will you wait five minutes? I want to get something."

Rountree answered affirmatively, and the younger man turned.

"I'll be right back," he called over his shoulder as he sped off.

The combination mine office and superintendent's quarters at the Big Dipper was an odd two-story frame structure; it formed a right-angled triangle, the hypothenuse set against the steep creek-bank. From the office on the ground floor—this was a large, well-lighted room facing upon a wide porch—a stairway led to a landing from which, on either hand, opened a bedroom, one occupied by Maxwell, the other by Cranston. From the latter's apartment another door opened directly upon a hillside path that led to the cook-house and mine-entrance.

Upon this path was also the small wooden house where the amalgam was retorted, and where the gold was molded into bricks for shipment. This building adjoined the upper part of the engine-house and lay between it and Cranston's quarters.

Gaining the path, Cranston stopped and looked about him. There was nobody in sight. He entered his room. Quickly emptying his suit-case of its contents—he reappeared and strode to the retort-house. The door opened. He entered, and almost instantly came out, hastening now to the barn where Rountree awaited him. The suit-case was stowed under the wagon-seat, and the team drove off.

"Anybody at the Western Star mine these days, Brick?"

The driver shook his head.

"Not even a watchman?" insisted Cranston.

Rountree eyed his companion narrowly.

"What do you want to know for?"

In answer Cranston placed his arm about Rountree's shoulders, whispering long and earnestly.

"No! But you're not going to do that! Not that, Burr!" exclaimed the driver huskily.

Cranston jerked his head decidedly.

"That's what I am, Brick! What's more, you're going to help!" he determined.

Rountree pursed his lips; a frightened look came into his gray-green eyes.

"I don't care if your father did treat you rough, you can't do that, Burr!" he admonished forcibly.

"Well, you'll leave me at the Western Star, anyway, eh?"

"Oh, I'll do that," agreed his companion.

"You'll be back about noon tomorrow?"

Rountree nodded.

"Then let's stop at the Junction, I want to buy some crackers and things. This horse-blanket under the seat will keep me warm. When you pick me up tomorrow, I'll bet you agree to join me. Remember, Brick, that you'll get your share of anything we clean up out of this!"

THE Western Star mine had been abandoned a year back—worked out. Already its many scattered wooden buildings showed signs of early decay. Cranston, horse-blanket over one shoulder, suit-case and bundle of food in hand, trudged up the unused, Winter-gouged road from the Arkansas Hill highway toward the tenantless settlement.

He selected a cabin from among the many and deposited his blanket and food. Carrying the suitcase he started in search of the blacksmith's forge. This stood in an open shed, and as he spied a sack of Welsh coal tumbled in one corner he vented a cry of delight. Here the suitcase was left, and, armed with pipe-wrench and hammer, he sought the engine-room.

An hour later he threw a sack upon the ground by the forge. It clanked as its heavy contents struck together. A fire was soon burning briskly, and then from the suitcase came a crucible. Into this went a miscellany of parts of faucets and grease-cups, all brass. In turn the crucible was set within a cup of white-hot coals, and Cranston fell to turning the hand-blower with a will.

Twice he emptied the flaming contents of the crucible, each time pouring the molten metal into the mold he had brought with him. When the second mass of glowing brass was emptied from the form it was nearly sundown, and he went back to the cabin for his food, completely satisfied with the afternoon's work.

Shortly before noon the following day Rountree found Cranston waiting for him at the roadside. Horse-blanket and suitcase,

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the latter heavier than on the previous afternoon, were thrown into the wagon. Cranston climbed in beside his friend, and the team moved on.

"I went to the railroad with you, if any one asks, Brick," his passenger reminded him.

"Sure you did!"

"Think better of my plan, eh?"

Rountree shook his head with decision.

"Are you dead-set on doing it?" Rountree asked seriously.

"I should say I am!" asserted Cranston.

"Will you give me till tomorrow night to think it over?" pleaded Rountree, weakening.

"Be too late then. I expect to turn the trick before that and make my getaway."

"Isn't there any other way, Burr?"

"I don't know of any."

Rountree looked squarely into the younger man's eyes as if to test the accurateness of the statement.

"Then, by gad, I'll join you! Here's my hand on it!"

His great scrawny paw closed over Cranston's long fingers.

The porch roof of the Junction extended like an awning over the road, and beneath it stood the watering-trough. It was in front of this that Rountree reined in the team. As the animals drank, the swinging barroom doors flew open, and Joe—his other name none seemed to know—the proprietor, ambled out upon the broad porch.

"Been to the railroad?" he inquired, his wrinkled, black-mustached visage friendly with a smile, his hands joined beneath the white bar-apron, accentuating his corpulence.

"For supplies." Rountree jerked his red head indicatingly.

"Anything new about the Golden Bow robbers?"

Rountree's tanned face paled.

"Not a thing," Cranston answered for him. "Funny, isn't it? They just disappeared like the snowball in the hot place."

Joe nodded appreciatively.

"Just what I thought," he said. "When the Golden Bow crowd came along here the day of the hold-up, I says to George Barr, the superintendent, 'George,' I says, 'if you want my advice—of course you don't have to take it—I wouldn't be looking to the railroad for them fellers, no sirree, I wouldn't. I'd look for a trail——'"

Rountree scowled as he picked up the reins and clucked to the team.

"Got to hurry, Joe," he explained. "Dinner'll be over if we don't hustle," and the horses broke into a trot.

It was not until mold and crucible had been replaced, and under his bed reposed his suit-case containing the result of his visit to the Western Star that Cranston felt at ease.

THE CLEAN-UP was an accomplished fact. The amalgam had been retorted, the mercury recovered, the crucible twice emptied, and Maxwell was weighing the gold bars preparatory to marking and recording their value.

Within the one-room retort-house were Cranston, a most interested spectator; "Squint" Peters, the mine blacksmith, and Maxwell.

"Five hundred and two and one-half ounces for this one; that's eight thousand and forty dollars at sixteen dollars an ounce," announced the superintendent, reaching for a hammer and the punches to mark the information deeply into the gold.

This done, he gave the bar a serial number and recorded it in his book.

The second brick weighed slightly more; five hundred and seven ounces; its value eight thousand one hundred and twelve dollars.

Cranston endeavored to control his excitement.

"Pretty fair clean-up, eh?" he suggested eagerly. "This ought to please father."

"Hope so," grunted Maxwell. "Still, he's hard to please. Expects an increase each time. Last month we sent down a little more."

He ran his finger along the page, and added:

"Previous shipment was nearer seventeen thousand. Bet you we hear from this!"

Cranston started, then his face showed keen disappointment. He had hoped for an opportunity to effect a substitution, but Maxwell, after cooling the bars, placed each within a leather case and turned to him with:

"Come, I'll show you where we keep our babies, where they'll rest till tomorrow morning." And carrying his burden by the strap attached to each, he led the way.

Cranston followed dumbly.

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"I always feel better," remarked Maxwell, entering Cranston's room, "when these are in the safe. Will you hold back the door *on to the landing?*"

Cranston obeyed, and Maxwell staggered down the stairs. Midway between the landing and the office below he halted. An electric light burned continually in the dark stairway. It was under this he had stopped to set down his load.

Cranston drew a quick deep breath. He hesitated a moment, then stepped suddenly back from the doorway. His hand grasped the field-glasses lying upon the bureau—there he had left them when emptying the suit-case. Hurriedly focussing them, he stood in the door's shadow and watched. The superintendent was removing a wooden panel. It slid squeaking along its grooves, exposing a coin-safe imbedded in concrete built into the hillside.

Maxwell straightened, undid the loop in the cord attached to the light, and seizing the lamp with his left hand began to twist the knob controlling the tumblers.

The watcher held his breath.

Four turns to the right, the dial stopped at 83; three left, 79; two right, 19; half a turn left, 41; back to 27, and Maxwell's hand reached for the lever. It turned. The safe door swung open.

Cranston's heart thumped. He glided back into his room. A pencil scratched the magic numbers on the fly-leaf of an unused school book. Not for nothing had he played the game of looking upon a number of articles displayed on a table, then turning his back and telling accurately what he had seen! That had developed his photographic memory. Only over one number did he stumble; the next to the last, but by shutting his eyes the dial reappeared clearly; it was 41, not 52, and he corrected it.

The safe door banged shut. Maxwell was replacing the wooden panel.

"Well, that's done!" he exclaimed. "Now, tomorrow morning we'll have the stuff on its way to Arkansas Hill, and after that Wells Fargo's Express can grow gray with guarding it."

Cranston started down the stairs.

"Perfectly secure where it is now?" he laughed nervously.

"You better believe it is! And we won't leave this place without somebody on watch till it goes. Dutchy Geiger'll guard until I've had my supper, then you and I'll sit 'round and smoke. We can take turns during the night," suggested Maxwell.

"Sure," agreed Cranston, but in his own ears his alacrity sounded forced and hollow.

"Think I'll go into the mine for a spell. Want to come?"

"No thanks, I'll stay with Geiger," was Cranston's reply, and, as he nodded to the little fair-haired bookkeeper bending over his desk in the corner by the window, Maxwell left.

The office clock ticked loudly. Four o'clock already! Maxwell would be back by five, possibly sooner. If anything was to be done, it must be done at once.

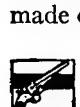
But how, how, how? Cranston racked his brain for a plan to entice Geiger away from the office. A grin spread over his beardless face and his brown eyes twinkled.

"You're always bragging about your shooting; want to bang at a target, Geiger?" he asked languidly.

"I'd like to, but I've got to get this pay-sheet ready to mail to the San Francisco office," was the sighed response.

"Shucks! You can finish that this evening. I'll go and get Brick Rountree. He's like you and Max, always talking about what he can do with a pistol. We'll just set up a tomato-can or a bottle in the stream-bed and pot at it. I'm dead tired of doing nothing! I'll be back in five minutes."

Cranston slipped through the door, and made off toward the barn.



"YOU keep your eyes open, Brick, and give me lay. Understand?"

Cranston and Rountree were approaching the office veranda, and the latter, who was spinning the chambers of his old-fashioned six-shooter against the palm of his left hand, nodded.

"Oh, Dutchy! Geiger!"

"Coming," shouted the bookkeeper, appearing immediately at the door.

"Shall we begin at twenty-five yards?" asked Cranston.

"Sure that isn't too much for you and Brick?" chuckled Geiger.

"I'll bet you a half I knock the blamed tomato-can off five times running," scowled Rountree.

"That would be taking candy from a baby!" Geiger laughed.

"I'll bet you can't hit it three times out of five," Rountree flung at him.

"Both of you put up a half," suggested

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Cranston. "Best score to take the pot, fifteen shots to decide, and I'll challenge the winner at a dollar a corner."

"Done!" agreed Geiger. "Where'll we shoot from?"

"The road here," Rountree proposed.

"Now, you fellows begin. I'll get my gun and ammunition. I'll have to clean the old thing, but that won't take long," Cranston explained, leaving them.

On the stairs he halted and listened.

Bang! A shout of triumph from Geiger. A distant growl from Rountree as he sprang forward to replace the mark. Cranston's fingers twitched nervously. The panel stuck. A little force, and it slid back. The tumblers clicked as the dial swung right and left. Slowly the last number touched the mark. A shaking hand twisted the lever. The door opened.

Bang! Bang! The firing was more rapid. Geiger evidently had missed. Cranston seized the heavy leather pouches; dragged them to the stairs. He closed the safe door; turned the lever, but did not throw the tumblers. The wooden panel screeched back into place, and he staggered to his room, panting. The leather-cased bars of gold were flung upon the bed and covered with the spare blanket.

Cranston stepped to the bureau and grasped his revolver. This in hand, and with an oily rag and cleaning-rod stuck into the barrel, he sauntered out upon the upper path. Geiger was still firing.

"What's Dutchy's score, Brick?"

Geiger turned a black face.

"I've got two more shots. I've hit six times."

"He's missed seven times, he means," shouted Rountree, who behind a boulder in the creek-bed watched the can, replacing it each time a shot dislodged it. "Say, I can beat him hands down!" taunted the teamster.

Bang! The can flew from its resting-place.

"Seven-seven; fifty-fifty!" Cranston called. "You'll have to do better than that, Geiger, or I'll lose the pleasure of taking a dollar away from you."

Bang! Again the can toppled.

"Eight out of fifteen!" announced Rountree, rising. "Change places with me, and I'll show you shooting as is shooting," he boasted.

Cranston went withindoors. He removed the blanket and dropped the treasure to the floor. Hurriedly the straps were unbuckled. As quickly the false bars were exchanged for the real, and the latter hidden in the suit-case.

"Hi! Burr! Ain't you ever coming?"

Cranston thrust the suit-case under the bed.

"Oh, I can lick the stuffing out of him!" boasted Rountree shrilly.

Cartridge-belt in one hand, revolver in the other, Cranston sprang down the stairs three at a time. From the veranda he saw Geiger crouching among the boulders. At Rountree's side stood Maxwell. And the safe was open!

"I'll challenge you Max," offered the newcomer. "When Brick gets through, you take a whirl, and then the winner of our bout will shoot off against the winner of theirs."

"Fifty cents a corner?" asked the superintendent.

"Just a measly half," Rountree assured him and went on with his firing.

Cranston fidgeted. He sat down, he got up again. He wiped his weapon, he loaded it. He placed it in its holster, he took it out and held it in his hand. And the gurgling creek seemed to whisper ceaselessly:

"The safe door is unlocked! *Unlocked!* UNLOCKED!"

Maxwell noted his nervousness.

"I won't have trouble beating you, Burr," he laughed. "You're as restless as a colt."

"Shucks! I'll steady down after the first shot," Cranston retorted, and the match went on. Rountree made ten hits and five misses. Cranston stood up.

"Let me shoot first, Max?" he begged.

"Have it your own way, my boy. Geiger, will you stay there to replace the can? You won't have much to do till I get into action," suggested the superintendent.

"Oh, he won't, eh?" scorned Cranston, and he blazed away.

"Seven hits, eight misses! And I thought you were some shot, Burr! Here, give me your gun, and I'll take a whirl."

Cranston passed the weapon, and placed the cartridge-belt in the superintendent's hand.

"I'm going after my rifle. When you and Brick have fought it out, I'll challenge all of you; same target, but with rifles, and range two hundred yards."

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"If you think you can do better with your rifle, go get it," bantered Maxwell, and Cranston swung pettishly up the path.

The fusillade continued. Maxwell shot rapidly. Already six shots, and Cranston had only gained his room. A pause; the revolver was being reloaded. Another shot! The leather pouches were slung over his shoulder. Another! He was on the stairs. He moved carefully down the steps. Another! The panel stuck again. Another shot!

Cranston dropped the bags and went at it with both hands. Another! Was that ten or eleven? He pounded the wood, the panel moved. Another shot! The firing ceased. His hand flew to the lever and the safe opened. *Bang!* Another.

Cranston stooped and lifted the heavy weight. Another! Feverishly, he thrust the bags within. He grasped the lever and slammed the door. He shoved the bolt, threw the tumblers. *Bang!* The wooden door refused to budge, and he heard a shout from Maxwell.

"Rotten! Six misses. Wait, I'll get my own gun!"

Cranston threw himself at the panel in a panic. Another bang; that was the garden gate. Another moment, and Maxwell would be at the office door! A violent tug. With a screech the door slid unwillingly along the dusty groove. Sweat beaded Cranston's brow. He leaped up and sprang down the stairs.

"What did you make," he panted, coming face to face with the superintendent. "I heard you shout," he offered in explanation.

Maxwell repeated his score hurrying up the stair. Cranston wheeled and followed, to return at once laden with rifle and cartridges.

The match went on until Ah Toy, beating the welcome triangle, summoned all to supper.

Cranston drew Rountree aside.

"It's in my room," he breathed in the teamster's ear. "I'll put it in the gunny sack. You can take it to the barn and hide it till tomorrow. After supper I'll tell you what to do with it. I've got it all planned, the getaway, too! Come on to supper! It's perfectly safe where it is," he confided, and the two followed Maxwell, leaving Geiger on guard.

AT SEVEN the next morning all was noise and bustle about the mine office. Three saddled horses were tied to the garden's picket fence; three riders stood in a knot talking. Maxwell, a revolver in one hand, rifle in the other, preceded Geiger who carried the two leather pouches. Passing through the gate the superintendent approached a roan horse.

"This your animal, 'Squint'?" he asked of Peters.

The man nodded, and sprang forward to assist Geiger in tying the leather pouches, saddle-bag-fashion, behind the cantle.

"Here, Belcher, take this rifle. Squint Peters'll pack the pistol. Twiggs, you're going to ride ahead, so you'll have the sawed-off. Geiger'll get it for you in a moment."

Maxwell tried the treasure bags to make sure they would hold.

"I'll get the shotgun," offered Cranston, who, during the preparations, had leaned a lazy spectator against a porch post.

"Fine!" Maxwell thanked him.

"Why all the artillery?" laughed Cranston.

"Can't let 'em pull off another Golden Bow trick."

"Pistol, rifle, sawed-off shotgun—what's the answer? Think they'll run into a troop of Mexican bandits, Max?"

"Well, I've got it figured out like this, Burr," began the superintendent. "Shorty Twiggs rides fifty yards ahead. If he's surprised it will be a short-range matter and a shotgun is the thing. If Twiggs is held up, Squint has a chance with his revolver, while Belcher, fifty yards in the rear, has a long-range weapon and he'll be in a position to use it."

"Clever scheme!" praised Cranston. "If the Golden Bow had done that there would never have been a robbery."

"Exactly! All ready, boys? Good! Now, take your time. The stage doesn't pull out of Arkansas Hill till one o'clock, so you won't have to hurry. Don't spend all your money for booze, and be back before midnight," Maxwell cautioned with a laugh.

A chorused grin and hands waved in salute from the riders, and the cavalcade started.

"I'm still tired—a short walk, then a nap for mine," announced Cranston, and he swung off up-stream, while Geiger and

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Maxwell lounged back into the office.

Ten minutes later, and by a circuitous path, he had reached the barn. Rountree's horse, all saddled and with its owner's coat rolled tightly about a well-filled gunny sack fastened behind the cantle, stood tied to a ring at the door.

"I'm all ready, Burr," blustered the teamster.

"Just a minute, Brick. I want to write out your instructions." Cranston seated himself upon the bench and scribbled diligently. "Now, read it over." He handed the paper to Rountree, waiting patiently as it was slowly read. "Understand?"

The other nodded.

"When you've done all that and got rid of your swag, loaf back to the Western Star. Keep under cover, and tonight I'll join you near the Junction. Got any grub?"

Again the teamster nodded.

"All right. Now, take the ridge trail, and for the land's sake keep under cover!"

Cranston scanned the deserted landscape with satisfaction. Rountree mounted and disappeared round the corner of the barn bound for the little-used trail among the pines.

AT SUPPER Maxwell appeared nervous and excited, and soon after dark excused himself and walked down the road. Cranston went to his room, but slipped quietly through the door to the upper path and followed the superintendent.

He had guessed rightly; Maxwell was headed for the barn. For a space Cranston hid, but watched. A clatter of hoofs, and a horse galloped down the road. An interval later Cranston rode forward more leisurely, yet kept the scent, for the dust hovered long in the hot night air. At the bend the lights of the Junction first came into view. Cranston halted. Shortly the swinging doors shot a glare across the road, and he spurred his horse. Within a hundred yards he stopped again. This time he whistled, and a rustle in the brush announced that his signal had been heard.

Rountree gained his side.

"All set, Burr! Everything according to Hoyle." "Here," and he thrust something into Cranston's hand.

"You wait for me, Brick! I'm going into the Junction," said the younger man.

"I'll wait, but not here. I'll ride up with you and hold your horse," decided Rountree.

Together they moved forward.

Burrell Cranston crept silently toward an unshaded side window of the road-house. Instead of peering at once into the low-ceilinged barroom he took from his breast pocket the roll of papers Rountree had given him and scanned their contents eagerly. With a smile he crumpled them back and turned to gaze into the Junction's interior.

Leaning against the bar was Maxwell. At his left Belcher, Peters and Twiggs crowded close, while the black-mustached visage of Joe was craned forward as he talked rapidly.

Then Maxwell spoke and Joe drew back, eying him closely. In a pause he turned to the others and nodded approval.

Cranston gained the porch and sidled to the door. The loud murmur of the rushing river behind the Junction obliterated coherent understanding of the low conversation, but isolated phrases at times leaped forth from the confused colloquy:

"Make it three robbers!" "Tied up all day." "You discovered us, Joe!" "How about the horses?" "Be sure you all tell the same yarn!"

Cranston shouldered through the swinging doors and stood near the threshold.

"Just getting back from town, fellows?" he asked.

The five men grouped beneath the hanging lamp wheeled with electric swiftness, staring wide-eyed as at a ghost.

"We've been held up!" cried Belcher, recovering himself first. "Three masked men jumped us this morning near the old Western Star! Carried us to the old mine buildings! We lay there all day, gagged and hog-tied!" he blurted in a breath, then nervously rubbed his long nose.

"They lifted the horses, too!" complained Twiggs.

"Joe, here, turned us loose!" asserted Peters, squinting at the bartender.

"Heard your cries from here when you were gagged!" exclaimed Cranston incredulously.

"I was coming from town," was Joe's stammered explanation.

"When did it happen?" demanded Cranston, all interest.

"This morning, half an hour after we started!" chorused his informants.

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"What are you going to do about it, Maxwell?"

"Organize a posse! Notify the sheriff! Send word to the old man!" he jerked out.

"You should have sent word to the Big Dipper at once, Joe. How long have these men been here?" Cranston demanded imperiously, striding forward.

"'Bout an hour. Not more than that. They had to have something to eat," stammered the saloon-man, and, bending over the bar, his black eyes pleading with Belcher for confirmation.

"A small boy could have walked to the mine in that time! Didn't think of that," sneered Cranston.

He brushed up to the counter and slapped a familiar-looking paper under Maxwell's eyes.

"Read that!" he ordered.

A whispered oath snapped from the superintendent's lips.

"What is it, Max?" inquired Belcher, nosing closer.

"A receipt from the express company for two gold bars!" laughed Cranston triumphantly. "You fake highwaymen had all your trouble over a couple of hunks of brass. Let me read you——"

"Hands up, everybody!"

Rountree's red head burst through the swinging doors. Each of his hands held a leveled weapon.

"'Way up, Nosey! No funny business, Squint! I saw you make a move for your gun. Take away their shooting apparatus, Burr, then I'll back 'em into a corner," suggested Rountree.

Five bewildered men were huddled in an angle of the room. Cranston at the bar was removing cartridges from an accumulation of weapons.

"Now's a good time to read what you was going to read when I interrupted," said Rountree, grinning. "Afterward we'll hobble 'em, get 'em ready for the sheriff."

Cranston cleared his throat as he opened the telegram.

"This applies principally to you, Maxwell," he explained.

There was a gleam of deep satisfaction in the eyes turned for the moment on the superintendent's drawn visage.

"Listen!

San Francisco, July 21, 191—.
11:38 A.M.

Burrell Cranston,
Arkansas Hill, Cal.,

Appoint you superintendent of Big Dipper. Arrest Maxwell and all involved. Coming on night train. You certainly have made good. Congratulate you on stopping leak in Big Dipper.

William Cranston.

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FROM THE SEAS

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Beyond the Rim," "On the Account," etc.

CHAPTER I

VOODOO

AT THE point where the mangroves completely usurped the beach, clawing the sand with warped, horned feet and hands, reaching from bush-tangled cliffs far into the shallows of the tide-water, the Carib halted.

"Obeah woman thataway," he said, pointing to the distorted jungle, his eyes averted. "Me, I stop along this place. Too much *ju-ju* belong that bush."

He held out an eager hand for the gaudy handkerchief that had bribed him to act as guide, stripped off the rag that had emphasized his nakedness, adjusted the new loin-cloth and hurried back along the dazzling beach, spotted with cindery lumps of dead coral, matted here and there with dark, savage tufts of brush.

The four men he had brought to the verge of the Voodoo Swamp were, by their speech, white; though every inch of exposed flesh was tanned the color of mahogany. Two of them, stocky of build and stolid of unshaven face, wore hoops of gold in their ears. Their muscular arms, hairy as a tarantula's back, hung almost to their knees. Each wore a scarlet stocking-cap, a grimy, tarry, short-sleeved shirt tucked into wide breeches striped like a barber's standard, and bucket-topped boots of brown leather. Above their leather belts, sashes of soiled silk were wound from which peeped the butts of pistols and the hilts of short cutlases.

The other two were of different build and character. Both wore laced coats and cocked hats with small clothes, silk stockings and square-toed shoes with buckles, but the slighter of the two, meager-shanked, sloping-shouldered, loose of mouth and vacuous-eyed, a chicken-down mustache on his upper lip, seemed wearing the cast-off garments of the other. The lace was tarnished, the seams were snail-tracked, the cloth spotted with salt water and the shoe-buckles brass. He carried no weapons.

The fourth man was preeminently the leader, spruce as a king's commander on his quarterdeck, broad of shoulder, narrow of hip, clean of chin and cheek. His eyes held the chill and color of ice under a sunless sky, unfriendly, lacking highlights. His nose was a beak, his mouth a thin-lipped slit; brows and hair were jet black and lusterless. A light sword, gold-mounted about its shagreen grip, hung at his hip, two pistols were stuck in a belt of carven leather of

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which the buckle, like those on his shoes, was silver.

He stood with his well-shaped legs apart, his long shadow trailing purple on the coral grit, looking sardonically at the two seamen; one hand, half hidden by lace ruffles, on the shoulder of the vague-eyed youth.

"Well, my bullies," he said in a voice that startled with its peculiarly even tones, sharing the constant menace of his eyes; "who's for reading his future life—and death. Eh, Ben? What, Sam? Are you afraid of the witch?"

The men shifted sullenly under the cold eyes that fascinated them, looking like caged tigers who watch the loaded whip of the trainer.

"Whether I swing in a loop or croak with a foot of steel in my ribs, it boots little, so long as I live merry while I may," said one of them. "I want to sleep well of nights, not count the days to the prophecy of a ranting crone."

His comrade dug the toe of one boot into the sand as he muttered an assenting "aye."

"The less ye have of life the more ye can crowd it, if ye know the limit," said their leader. "Ye can stay outside. Dickon will come in with me, eh, Dickon?"

The youth winced as the other gripped his shoulder, gasped once and tugged uneasily at the fluffy proofs of his adolescence.

"Why that's a brave lad. It takes a fool to shame the pair of ye. Come on."

They plunged into the maze of twisted boughs, hooped and curved, reaching out with snaky suckers, tripping them, clutching at them, the laurelly leaves rustling in sudden whispers as they passed. At times they walked on the larger branches that bridged the puddles of the festering swamp. Insects stabbed at them with virulent buzzings, the air reeked of rotting vegetation and the sweat broke through in dark patches on the shirts of the seamen, trailing their imperturbable leader who flicked away the mosquitoes with a lace-bordered handkerchief and hummed snatches of a song as he strode ahead.

They broke through suddenly upon a circle of white sand, a natural clearing in the heart of the mangrove swamp. The cliffs backed it, on the farther side the morass continued. A matted wall of verdure hid the sea and muffled the boom of the surf. A log canoe proclaimed the presence of a channel to deep water. In the center of the open space palmetto scrub and cabbage palms masked a low hut, walled and roofed with dried grass.

The sun beat down relentlessly as they crossed the sand. There was no sound but the distant drum of the waves on the reef. Just as they reached the shadows of the palms a raucous voice seemed to explode in mid-air.

"Ha-ha! Here come more fools! Ha-ha-ha!"

The seamen stopped, uprolling fearful eyes. The one called Sam furtively crossed himself. The other swore, half drawing a pistol.

"The bird is right," said their leader. "Fools ye are, but the crone should teach it better manners."

A streak of green flashed as a parrot flew shrieking from one palm to another, lighting on the roof of the shack with a cry of "Fools! *Ha-ha!*" before it cocked its head on one side and watched with its bright eyes for a threatening motion.

The door of the hut stood darkly open. A tongue of fire showed beyond its threshold, framed in the oblong of black shade.

"Welcome, brethren of the seas." The croaking voice, a replica of the parrot's, came from beyond the fire.

The hut was filled with a murk of pungent smoke that brought water to the eyes of the leader and the youth as they entered, leaving the seaman standing in the sun. An indistinct figure cast something on the embers that made them flare and snap and give out a perfume that penetrated to the brain.

The voodoo-witch squatted beyond the crackling embers like a bright-eyed toad. Straggling wisps of gray hair hung Medusa-wise beneath a turban of mottled black and yellow. Earthen vessels stood in the ashes. Vague objects swung from the rafters. The teeth of the younger man suddenly chattered and he turned to bolt for the open. As the other swiftly caught and held him, the door swung quietly to, leaving them in the firelit, suffocating hut with the squatting hag who cackled as she held up the object she held in her lap, the dried head of a child.

"The fount of wisdom," she said. "Here it begins, and here—"she reached behind her and brought to view a skull—"here it ends. But who knows where it goes or whence it comes? Tell me that, brave Captain. Back, Naya, back!"

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An alligator had come waddling from the shadows, its slimy jaws agape, and she cuffed it between the cruel eyes that were not unlike those of the leader.

"Forget the mummery, mother," said the latter. "If I thought myself as wise as thou, would I fight through that pestiferous swamp to visit ye? Here is gold. Now read my future and swiftly. This place is stifling."

The crone's avid claw cupped the coin and thrust it in her wrinkled bosom. Once more she reached back of her, setting in her lap a bowl made from the upper half of another skull, yellow with age and polished from handling, gleaming like ivory in the firelight that burned brilliantly, no longer giving out the resinous fumes.

"Once this held the brain of a king," she said. "A bold man, such as thou, impatient and masterful. Yet he died. He was my father—and a king."

She took a pipkin from the coals and poured its steaming contents in the gruesome goblet, a sirupy stream of black liquid. Then she peered up at him, her eyes glazed crimson with the fire, her smutty skin scored and puckered like the hide of the alligator that was her familiar.

"You want to know what life holds for you?" she asked.

"It holds what I can clutch," he answered.

"Are ye brave enough to know your death? Eh, are ye brave enough for that? Then take the bowl and tell me what ye see."

He held the grisly thing in his hands and gazed. Vague shapes formed in the rising, cooling scum.

"I am no conjuror," he said as he handed it back.

She cackled quietly.

"Then I will read. I see, eh, I see much, and this I will tell you, ye need fear death from no living man or woman, oh son of no father."

The man's black brows knitted to a line and his hand sought the hilt of his sword. The witch had not raised her eyes from the skull and went on evenly.

"Nay, if ye seek to harm me, how shall I read? I tell what I see. No living soul shall cause your death yet—look!"

She thrust the bowl forward. Black bubbles surged upward and broke in a miniature storm.

"A violent death."

"Shall I kill myself, dame?"

"Only as all men kill themselves. Now the steam clears again. You will lose even as you win."

"A truce to these riddles. I have no time to waste."

"Time! Men do not waste it. Time wastes men. Is the future a shining mirror? I see in the magic glass, but I see dimly. The shapes rise. Women shall be your bane. One woman, who has passed but shall come again. Yet the sea shall be your only bride and death the priest who joins you to her kiss."

"Drowning is a seaman's death."

"But not yours—not yours. And, after death, you still shall ride the seas."

By some skilful sleight of hand the liquid churned suddenly then stilled.

"That is all," said the crone. "The glass is broken." With a swift movement she emptied the contents of the skull upon the fire which died with a swift hiss, plunging the hut in pitchy darkness. The man swore as his fingers closed upon a pistol-butt. His companion whimpered. The door behind them swung open, letting in the filtered sunshine.

The place was empty. The voodoo witch was gone! The man turned, the other clutching at his sleeve, and strode into the open, his deep chest rising as he sucked in the fresh air.

Beckoning to the two seamen, he led the way swiftly from the little grove. As they left the shadows that seemed reaching after them, the parrot screamed above their heads, flying high and wheeling to the cliffs.

"Fools! Ha-ha-ha-hah!"

They made their way in silence back through the mangrove swamp and along the free beach to where a pinnace lay, half in, half out of the creaming tide edge. Four men got up from where they lay in the shade of a hump of coral and prepared to launch the boat. The straight line of the man's brows broke and he laughed.

"Why then, I am immortal," he said. "The hag gives me a charmed life. No living man or woman shall harm me. I die not by my own hand. The sea my bride and death the priest! And, after death, I ride the seas. A rare fortune and a strange one! Ye shall make me a ballad of it, Dickon. Back to the ship, my bullies."

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CHAPTER II

THE PLANTATION

FOUR people sat upon the stone terrace at the back of the plantation garden, seated beneath the shade of great saman-trees. Below and in front of them the fertile soil rioted with roses and jasmine, orchids clinging to the trunks of palms, shrubs whose variegated foliage was almost as brilliant as the flowers.

Behind, beyond the balustrade, the green hills dropped in broad levels to the settlement of Bridgetown, its pink and blue houses showing in a fronded bower between the slender palms, the gray fort, touched with sunlight, guarding the roadstead where a bluff-bowed frigate rode among the lesser shipping. Lustrous birds shot through the warm air in iridescent flashes—the emerald blades of the ripening cane rustled beyond the garden hedges and the chant of slaves came faintly to the lounging occupants of the wicker chairs.

The man in the uniform of a naval lieutenant rose in courtesy as his host left his seat and walked to the balustrade, leaning slightly on a crutch-handled cane of ebony. The planter was clad in loose linen, no whiter than his vigorous crop of hair and Manning looked admiringly at the straight back, almost too well-poised for a civilian's, that had not bowed the fraction of an inch beneath the yoke of time.

The planter leaned upon the broad coping of the balustrade, one leg slightly drawn up, gazing with eyes that held their youthful fire at the harbor.

He looks like a foot-fettered falcon, thought Manning. And his daughter is of the same breed. He glanced to where the girl sat, her clean-cut face in silhouette, firm of chin, daintily aquiline of nose, high of brow beneath masses of brown hair that seemed to have enmeshed the sunlight.

Face and manner, as she sat apparently wrapped in her own thoughts, oblivious to the presence of the young officer in his bravery of gold, were imperious. It was not a pose, he decided. Her eyes, as she had greeted him, had held a strange look in the depths that were almost purple beneath the long lashes. He could not read it. It was neither sullen, nor sad, a moodiness that did not fit her youth and beauty.

"So ye come at the requisition of the governor," said the planter. "Did Sir Richard bespeak a frigate? Ye will have scant success chasing the shallow-bottomed craft among the creeks and channels. I was an old king's man myself, Lieutenant Manning, before a bullet shattered my knee and sent me to the Indies to plant sugar. A frigate! Ye might as well have come in a four-decker!"

"Sir Richard Dutton has promised us two light-draft sloops. I am to have command of one. Our commission, as ye know, is to sweep the freebooters from the Carribbean, to find their nests and fire them, to hang the leaders, first with hemp and then in chains at the main harbor-mouths, but first to seek out certain pirates who have harried the gold ships from Demerara and pillaged various plantations from Tobago to Santa Lucia."

"A large order," said the planter sarcastically. "These blackbirds are many and their nests hard to find. Sir Richard seems to fear that some of them may come to Barbados and raid the town under the very guns of the fort. But Sir Richard has never smelled powder and ye have but to whisper the name of Captain Cypher in his ear to set him shaking with a palsy of apprehension."

The girl smiled slightly at the tirade. Her aunt, a faded woman, seemingly content to blend ever with the background, looked deprecatingly at the mild treason of her brother.

"Where in the devil is that boy with the *sangaree?*" exploded the latter.

A negro appeared as he spoke, hurrying through the garden with a silver salver bearing the fragrant drink in a pitcher of the same metal, beaded with cold dew. A long draft seemed to modify the choler of the planter. He limped back to his chair and let the negro fan him.

"A murrain on such carpet appointments," he said more quietly. "Bess, there, is but lately back from England and she tells me all things go by favor. Unless you have the good-will of George or his favorites, merit goes begging."

Manning lifted his glass somewhat stiffly.

"I drink the king, sir," he said.

The elder laughed and pledged him.

"Tush, man, we are all good royalists here," he said. "Did not we of Barbados, under Willoughby, fight the forces of the

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commonwealth until they smothered us? God save the king! I am an old man and to me kings pass but the country stands. England has ever curbed its monarchs when they became loose-bridled and forgot the meaning of liberty. I pledge ye back. To England!"

"This Captain Cypher," said the lieutenant. "The governor mentioned him as a dangerous rogue last night at dinner. 'Tis like I shall be sent to apprehend him. We have information of his whereabouts and look to find more."

"A dangerous rogue indeed. A crafty villain. I have not seen him, but he is said to fear no man and love no woman. His eyes lack the light of a soul behind them. His men call him 'The Demon' and swear that he is in league with Satan. There are a score of ballads concerning him. He bears a charmed life, they say, and boasts that no living being may harm him. His name is a confessed subterfuge but none know the rightful one.

"He lords it over his men like a king and they are said to be the hardest-bitten rascals that ever scuttled a ship. He carries his own ballad-monger, a half-wit, who helps to spread the terror of Cypher throughout the Antilles and, by that same method, bring to his ship the pick of recruits. The rogues have a stronghold on some small cay in the Leeward Islands, 'tis said, north of Dominica."

Manning's eyes gleamed as the planter talked. His fingers gripped about the glass he held until the knuckles showed white. His eyes were gray and, for a moment, it seemed as if a scabbard had slipped and exposed the glint of steel. He caught the girl looking at him curiously.

"A man came aboard this morning who claimed he could show us this same stronghold," he said. "A shabby, hangdog rogue by the name of Drayton——"

THE GIRL suddenly leaned forward in her chair, her face pale as the jasmine at her breast, the lower lip caught up by her teeth until it seemed the blood must spurt, her eyes blazing into Manning's. Her father turned to his guest, clutching his cane as if it had been a sword. The knitting dropped from the lap of the elder woman and the negro's thick lips were parted, the whites of his eyes rolled and his ears seemed to prick forward. Manning gazed in amazement at the effect of his words. The planter was the first to recover.

"Pish," he said. "It could not have been he. He would not have ventured to Barbados nor, venturing, have given his name. How looked he?"

"Why, sir, I did not note particularly, save that he was unshaven and that his face matched his dirty linen. But he did not give his name. He claimed to be a turtler. Came aboard from a half-foundered sloop, patched of sail and hull."

"Who said his name was Drayton?"

The girl demanded rather than asked the question. A tiny drop of blood was on her chin and she wiped it away with her handkerchief as she spoke.

"That I can not say for a certainty. I was summoned to the cabin after he came on deck from seeing the commander. The captain told me that some one had discredited the man, one of the crew of the governor's pinnace, I think, saying he was not a turtler but a man named Drayton who had once lived in Barbados and left after having committed a crime. He marveled at his return."

"Why was he not followed and apprehended?"

Manning turned to answer the girl.

"It seems this rower of the governor was not sure of his man, did not, indeed place him, until he had left the frigate. He had made sail before the question came to the commander. He purposed to gather more information and bring it to us. You know him?"

"We knew a Drayton," said the planter. "If it is the same man?"

"You will go to the frigate, father? You will——"

A puff of smoke broke out from the frigate's side and the boom of a gun reverberated among the low hills. Manning rose hastily.

"That is the recall," he said. "It means we are to sail as soon as all are aboard. I must go, sir. I thank you for your hospitality. If I can serve you in any way, command me."

The planter seemed to recall his duties as host with an effort.

"I thank you, sir," he said with grave courtesy. "When you return, you must visit us again. You will pardon my not accompanying you. My knee. Boy, the lieutenant's horse."

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Manning had passed through the garden to the great hallway of the house that ran from rear to front when he heard the quick, light sound of feet behind him and turned.

"One moment, sir," said the girl. "You asked to serve. Did that include me?"

He felt himself the deliberate target of her beauty, now flaming with the heat of some fierce passion, her eyes filled with a direct appeal that seemed chivalric rather than personal. Long sea absences had invested Manning's attitude to women with unusual reverence. And there was something in him that answered to a call from her, a certain fierceness of spirit that rode him in moments of stress and now shone from her eyes.

"I should be honored," he answered simply. "It is yours to command, Miss Hastings."

She cast a glance around the darkened hall. The negro had gone ahead to bring up the officer's horse. She drew close to him, close enough for him to feel the swift breath of her whisper.

"Kill—Drayton—for—me."

She drew back, holding his gaze.

"*Kill him*," she repeated vindictively. "In return, I will promise you—anything."

Her eyes changed.

"Am I not beautiful?" they seemed to ask. "Am I not worth serving—to the death?"

Manning felt his pulses quickening to the strange tragedy of the situation, to the appeal of the high-bred, beautiful creature, half-girl, half-woman, vibrant, radiating the magnetism of her sex.

"Kill Drayton?" he stammered. "There is no doubt a reason—your father?"

Her look became scornful.

"My father is an old man, and lame. Yet if he meets this—this unspeakable scoundrel! Oh, that I were a man! The reason? Ask any one. I have no brother. Kill him—and then come back to me."

The figure of her aunt appeared in the entrance to the garden. The girl gave him a slim hand, cool save for the burning hollow of her palm. As he pressed it he could feel the racing pulses in her wrist and see the artery that throbbed in the white column of her neck.

"Good-by," she said conventionally. "Your horse, I see is ready. We shall see you again, I hope."

Manning rode down to the water-front in a maze. What could such a derelict as the informer have done to such a woman that she desired his death, that had made her father grip his cane as if he clutched the hilt of a sword? He remembered the knitting rolling from her aunt's lap, the straining eyes and ears of the negro. Above all the fierce intensity of the girl's voice persisted. "Kill him. I will give you anything. I have no brother! Oh, if I were a man!"

This Drayton, if he was the man that the governor's rower had esteemed him to be, had committed a crime. What was that misconduct? The girl's vivid face, changed from its moody aloofness as a curtain changes when a lamp is placed behind it, haunted him, appealed to him.

The frigate's barge was waiting. His junior hailed him as he took his place in the stern and gave the word of return.

"Great news, Manning! This villain Cypher has burned and looted a merchantman. He set them adrift in their own boats. They landed on the other side of the island. Word came across to the governor. We put to sea at once."

"But the sloops?"

"You lose your command this trip. Cypher is heading north with a shattered foremast. The merchantman put up a fight. We have the heels of him and the Old Man hopes to overhaul the fox before he runs to earth."

"What of this fellow Drayton? He was to return with more information."

"Belike he saw that the governor's man recognized him and took fright. He has not come aboard again since his sloop left harbor."

CHAPTER III

CYPHER

Full fifty gallant gentlemen lie sleeping in the ooze;
Yo-hey! Walk it around!
Fifty gallant gentlemen who perished in their shoes:
Yo-hey! Walk it around!
Ho, once from golden goblets their gullets ran with wine,
Now in and out their bony throats swim sea-snakes in the brine.
Yo-hey! The wind's i' the sail!
Yo-hey! The foam's to th' rail!
What are the odds if ye hang or are drowned?
Bend to it, bully-boys. Walk it around!

Oh, gallant was the galleon that sailed the Summer seas:
Yo-hey! Stamp it around!

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All shining silver were her sails a-curving to the breeze.
Yo-hey! Stamp it around!
Oh, gallant were her gentlemen and gay the life they led;
Though long ago the spider-crabs upon their flesh have fed.
Yo-hey! There's a sail on the bow!
Yo-hey! Now let the wind blow!
Show me a life that can better be found.
Up with the slack of it. Stamp it around!

DICKON, the loose-lipped, sat atop the capstan, tailorwise. About him surged sixteen brawny pirates, two to a bar, throwing their weight against the staves to the lilt of his melody. Dickon's eyes were bright. For the time being he was in command of hauling short the anchor, his words were inspiring the best efforts of the men who answered the crisp staccato of the "Yo-hey!" with sudden explosions of their force.

The schooner, which Cypher had called *The Nameless*, lay in the long lagoon of a cay shaped like a hairpin, one of a group of reef clusters. Palms grew on the narrow strips and at the loop. Tufts of palm trees were tied to the topmasts of the vessel and, even at close range, she was practically invisible. Barbados showed like a blue cloud to the westward, twenty miles away.

A pinnace, lug-rigged, stood up on the last tack for the cay entrance, dancing merrily over the blue water. A shrill whistle sounded from the boatswain's pipe and the men at the capstan stopped, wiping the sweat from their brows with the backs of clumsy, incurved hands as the anchor cable hung straight up and down under the schooner's forefoot.

The pinnace came smartly alongside and Captain Cypher, with "Silent" Sam, the crew's quartermaster-representative, and six rowers, boarded his vessel. He was immaculately dressed and fresh-shaven, his eyes holding what in them passed as good humor as he nodded to his minstrel-laureate and went below with Silent Sam, calling the boatswain to follow. Dickon looked after his chief with the eyes of a dog. To him Cypher was his one hero and a smile from him or a kindly word meant more to the half-wit than a meaty bone to a famishing hound.

"What of the mast?" demanded Cypher.

The Nameless carried no officers proper, save its commander and the quartermaster. Cypher was the sole navigator aboard, a matter that he made a precaution to bolster his supremacy of the lawless crew. The boatswain was in effect the mate by virtue of his ability to handle men and general sea-knowledge, outside of sextant and chart. He was the second of the seamen that had visited the voodoo-witch with Cypher and Dickon. Cypher had taken them in calculation of heightening the general impression that he was in league with the devil. Superstition was a good whip for discipline.

"We have fished it," answered the man. "'Twas not so bad as it looked when we cleaned the splinters. 'Twill serve in a light wind, without topsails, until we get to Cypher Cay and put a new stick in her. Do we make for there today?"

"Nay. We go to Barbados tonight. The tide will serve at sunset. Today we lie *doggo*. The frigate *Thetis* is at Bridgetown. The lubbers from the merchantmen landed on the southeast coast and carried their tale of woe to the governor. Also they told him we were crippled. The *Thetis* sails this afternoon to chase us northward as we were last seen heading. Also"—a grin widened his narrow lips for an instant—"they have been informed that Cypher Cay lies in that direction.

"We land at the bay that lies behind the Point of Pines and march inland. Sam, here, will make disposition of the men."

He turned to the quartermaster.

"Remember, the place can be seen from Bridgetown. There must be no firing of the cane nor of the house. No firearms to be carried save by squad leaders. The man who disobeys will be flogged and forfeit his share of loot. Cold steel will do what work is necessary."

"A plantation, Captain?" asked the boatswain, his piggy eyes gleaming at the prospect.

"Aye, Ben. And a rich one. The governor of Barbados has sent for the frigate to clear the Carribbean of buccaneers, sea-rovers, gentlemen of the seas, freebooters, pirates, or whatever they choose to call us. And he has done us the honor of especial mention. For that courtesy he should be repaid.

"If we had heavy guns enough I'd take the fort at Bridgetown and hang him to his own flagpole. As it is we'll loot the richest plantation in Barbados under his very nose. Would I could tweak that veined proboscis

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of his, but a coward always runs well and hides deep. But this will pull the feathers out of his cap and belike the next frigate that calls at Barbados will bring his recall."

Ben chuckled. The exploit was to his liking. It was worthy of Cypher and the men under him. Dickon would make a new ballad of it and their names would be in everybody's mouth. Notoriety and treasure, the two things dearest to the heart of a pirate.

"'Twill be a rare turn," he said as his slow imagination began to fire his blood. "Are there any women, Captain?"

Cypher frowned at him, his eyebrows underscoring his lowering forehead with a line of wrath.

"That is my affair," he said.

"No offense, Captain."

Ben retreated. As he reached the deck he chuckled.

"She must be a rare bird," he muttered, "if the captain holds her for his own plucking."

In the cabin Cypher turned to the taciturn quartermaster.

"There are two women, Sam," he said. "One is a dried husk, the other—shall be my charge. I have especial plans for that bird, once I have meshed her, and they are not yet ripe. Tell the men that we shall make a division of all loot after tonight's raid. If the weather keeps fair and the foremast holds, we'll make for Cypher Cay. If not, we'll return here for the sharing."

He nodded curtly and the quartermaster left him. Cypher sat, still frowning, struck a gong that hung above him and told the mulatto boy, who appeared before the vibrations ended, to bring him brandy.

HE LIT a cheroot and remained in his chair, sipping his liquor and watching the ash grow upon the tobacco-roll and the blue clouds of fragrance that filmed away through the companionway.

"Women shall be my bane," she told me, he muttered. "Now how much merit is there in that mummery? "One woman, who has passed but shall come again. Aye and pass again. I'll eschew the pretty playthings—once I have settled the present account."

He finished the cheroot and lit another, smoking moodily, the brandy steadily diminishing in the bottle. A dull glow crept into his gray-ice eyes.

"Her pride—to break that—to make her loathe herself as she affected to loathe me! So, that would do it."

He struck the gong again and sent for Dickon.

The poet came eagerly. Cypher pushed the brandy bottle to him.

"Take a swig to clear your voice lad and sing to me. Hast brought thy cithern? Good."

Dickon tried to conceal the swift water in his eyes that followed the fiery draft. Confession would mean another bumper and the stuff fuddled him unless he took a great deal of it. Then wonderful thoughts came into his head so fast that it ached and the men made a butt of him, as they did when he was seasick. He tuned his instrument and started to sing.

His voice was Dickon's greatest gift, given perhaps to balance his lack of brains. It was a clear, rich tenor, that dripped honey and held the sentimental note that could bring tears to the eyes and lumps in the throats of the toughest of the ruffians aboard *The Nameless* and turn them for a while into veritable doves of peace until the swift revulsion came and choked the half mock, half truly tender sentiment.

Cypher listened to the air rather than the words until Dickon came to the second stanza of his ballad.

Her eyes are like the little pools that sparkle in the sun.
Her lips the hue of coral where the shoreward currents run.
Her hair is like the midnight sky where clouds trail o'er the moon.
Her bosom's snow the spindrift shames, her——

"Perdition!"

The pirate's furious exclamation froze the song in Dickon's throat. His fingers struck a discord from the strings as he gazed wide-eyed at the threatening face of his captain.

"Can your tongue clack of naught but such folly? Sing of men, not women. A song with blood in it, blood and fire. A stave that is rollicking, not a love-sick mew. Sing!"

The minstrel swallowed hard to moisten his dry membranes. This was a new whimsy of the captain's. Why, hitherto . . . He broke his random thought and plucked the catgut to a livelier measure.

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I saw a galleon sailing
Across the bright moon's rim;
From keel to carven railing
With gold she was abrim.
I saw a ship that followed
The galleon down the wind,
Her canvas windy-hollowed,
A foaming wake behind.

I saw the red flames leaping
I heard the clash of steel,
With death a harvest reaping
As they sailed keel to keel.
I heard the shouts of foemen
At frenzied hit or miss,
I heard the shrieks of women
That ended in a kiss.

I saw the bright moon sinking,
I watched till it was gone,
While bloody men were drinking
Another deed well done.
The galleon was dredging
The ocean's slimy lees.
The buccaneers were pledging
The brethren of the seas.

Then ho! for steel a-shining,
For women, war and wine.
For tender arms entwining
Their revelry with mine.
The coward and the craven
Go fearful to their grave;
I sing the flag that's raven,
A life upon the wave.

Dickon looked up half fearfully as he ended the song. There were women in this one, too, he had not remembered that when he began. Women crept into all his rhymes, outside of that he knew little of them. The drabs that might have traded their charms for his share of gold inspired him with revulsion. To Dickon, woman was a shining, intangible glory, to be worshiped, hardly to be touched. And now the captain . . . .

Cypher was asleep, one hand about the bottle of brandy. Dickon picked up his guitar and tiptoed out of the cabin.

CHAPTER IV

LOOT

TWENTY men crept like shadows along the avenue of royal palms that led to the Hastings' plantation. As many more clambered over the terrace balustrade and made their silent way through the fragrant garden to the rear. On either side a score drifted through the cane, cursing under breath when the sharp edge of a leaf slashed face or hand. These last quietly surrounded the cabins of the negro quarters, waiting for the signal to herd the slaves who would later carry the loot of their master's possessions down to the ship on the other side of the island.

All lights were out in the cabins but they shone from the front room of the house. Silent Sam, peering through the shutters, saw the planter, dressed precisely in black, ruffled at neck and wrist, lace falling over his brocaded vest, seated opposite his daughter at a small table. A chess-board was between them, parked with the ivory men. A carven bishop was in the planter's hand. The girl sat with one hand to her forehead, shading her eyes from the light. Her aunt was dozing over a book.

There was a slight sound in the darkness behind the quartermaster. Some one had slipped on a stone. He sought recovery and his cutlass slid from its loose scabbard, clashing to the ground. The planter set down the piece and rose, limping swiftly to a tall sideboard of mahogany and taking from it two pistols, one of which he thrust into the deep side pocket of his skirted coat.

A sword stood in the angle made by the wall and the sideboard. He stripped it of its sheath and advanced toward the hall. The aunt sat bolt upright, her blue-veined hands grasping the arms of her chair. The girl kept place by the chess table, her head lifted and turned toward her father, only the quickened rise of her bosom showing any sign of agitation.

The planter stepped into the hall and flung wide the massive door. He had no thought of piracy taking place on Barbados, the governor's island, the fort in plain view from the terrace at the end of the garden. But the noise of the falling cutlass was distinct as it was unwarranted, and he was as imperious as he was choleric.

"Who is there?" he demanded, lifting his sword hand to a rope of twisted leather that hung in the entry. "Whence come ye?"

A shout answered him, a wolfish yell more fierce than loud, from twenty savage throats as the pirates leaped out of the darkness and flung themselves at the door, shouting the cry of all the buccaneers.

"From the seas!"

The planter fired and the foremost man tripped suddenly and fell on the threshold. The planter tugged at the leather bell-pull and the alarm-bell clanged its summons to the slave quarters, three brazen, ringing

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notes and then—silence. Some one had climbed the entry porch and severed the cord.

In the room the aunt shrieked "Pirates!" The girl ran to her father's side. A cutlass crashed against his slender blade that seemed to coil about it like a serpent and writhe its way into the breast of the bearded ruffian. The man fell gasping to his knees clutching with his last effort for the planter's ankles. The latter disengaged his sword, the cold steel smoking with the hot, red blood that clung to it, countered a swift thrust, got under his opponent's guard and ran his second man neatly through the shoulder.

The weapon of a third was upwhirled to cleave him while his blade was still fleshed. The girl's hand slipped to his pocket and withdrew, cocking the pistol as it came free and firing pointblank into the pirate's face. The bullet went through both cheeks, tearing through teeth and jaws, and the man gave a horrible roar that spouted blood as he staggered back.

For a moment the three men had blocked the doorway, Now the others, led by Silent Sam, came crowding through with cutlass and knife to make an end of it. Hastings met them with a grim twist of his lips. He might kill or disable one more of them, perhaps two, then he must go down, hacked and senseless. He sent one sharp command over his shoulder.

"To the garden, Bess. You and Lydia, while I can hold them."

The girl did not move but her aunt, the spinster who faded inevitably into backgrounds and knitted seconds to stitches through placid days, came with a rush into the hall, bearing the lamp. Shade and all she hurled at the pirates. The glass container broke, the unrefined oil spread flaming, lifting for a second or so a curtain of fire behind which the three made for the end of the hall, hoping to escape into the garden and hide in the cane. As yet no negroes had come to the alarm of the bell but . . . .

The door opened before they reached it and Cypher stepped into the hall. Back of him, illumined by the torches they carried, were the eager, villainous faces of the men who had come with him through the garden.

He bowed mockingly, his eyes evil as they rested on the girl who drew back with a sudden start, one hand pressed to her bosom. Then he spoke.

"Out with that fire, Sam! Mistress Hastings, I have come back again."

The planter's face was convulsed with rage and hatred. He leaped at the pirate leader with a sudden lunge that would have spitted a less agile swordsman. Cypher's own blade made a swift half circle, steel grating harshly against steel, and parried the older man's furious attack with a wrist at once supple and strong and a mastery of fence that made Hastings look like a novice with the sword.

The fire leaped and clung despite the efforts of the pirates who were beating at it with curtains dragged from the walls. Both doors were open in the hall, a wind had sprung up and came down the avenue of the palms and through the house, fanning the flames. In their light the two swords flashed prophetically red.

The bout was soon over. Cypher's strength weakened the planter's attack at every parry and turned it to a desperate defense. There were perhaps a score of swift exchanges before the pirate's point went home. The bright blood gushed out on the lace fall and Hastings, his sword falling from his nerveless hands, tottered and then swiftly collapsed. Leaning on one elbow, his eyes glazing, he uttered his last words.

"Drayton—you—dog—you!—If——"

THE FRAME of the house was wooden and the fire was soon beyond control. The pirates swarmed through the place, stripping it of valuables, driven from one room to another by the increasing conflagration, sped in their work by the knowledge that the red glare was giving the alarm. The negroes had been rounded up and stood with twitching faces and uneasy eyeballs, taking up the loads assigned to them. The Hastings' carriage was rolled out, the horses harnessed and a pirate mounted the box.

Inside the vehicle the girl sat with a face as pale and seemingly as lifeless as marble. Her aunt had swooned at sight of her brother's death and she did not know what had become of her. Rough hands had seized her from behind and borne her off. She had a brief glimpse of men thrusting her aunt's senseless body to one side with their feet before she was set face to face with Cypher, her arms bound tightly behind her with a belt-strap.

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"My bullies are paying themselves for their trouble," he said, "but the trip was made on your account, Bess. Your account and mine. We are going to settle it."

She made no answer but forced the grief from her eyes and looked at him with a contempt that burned.

"I have thought very carefully about the matter of payment," he said. "It will be made more ample, I think, if I tell you the terms beforehand, so that you may get the full value of the prospect.

"We do not allow women aboard *The Nameless*, save as transient voyagers. But at Cypher Cay there are several. I do not know how you will get along with them—but, I can imagine. They belong to my men. For myself, I no longer care for the sex."

Her disdainful eyes, that rested upon him as impersonally as if he had been some unpleasant object that she could not avoid, therefore contemplated, were forcing him to lose his self-control. He fought to retain the even tone he affected but could not—once he stammered and once twisted his syllables.

"So then, for you, my pretty lady, your daintiness shall be the prize at a dicing main. The man who throws the highest hand takes you and holds you, until he is tired of you. With your beauty it will be long before it fades beyond the interest of some one in the crew. They are not all as particular as I am."

Still she looked at him unmoved, breaking his fierce desire to clutch her throat and throttle her, to beat her haughty face to a pulp with his fists and scream his foul thoughts at her, sensing that back of everything, back even of her corpse if he should kill her, would be something that would still hold him in the chill scorn that is born and made invincible by knowledge. For a moment he saw his own soul as she did and he turned from the sight with a fierce flood of invective to his men.

THE negroes were marshaled at last. Cypher opened the carriage door as if to ride beside his prisoner and changed his mind. As the files started, a shriek came from a dense clump of shrubbery and the girl saw her aunt flying down the avenue pursued by the ruffian who had flushed her from the hiding-place to which she had crawled. The other pirates looked on, jesting at the speed of the fear-driven woman. Cypher called the man back.

"There is no time to waste," he said. "Let her go. She is no ornament. The whole island will be on us before long. —— that fire. Who started it?"

"The woman who got away, Captain. She threw a lamp just before you opened the door in back. I saw her through the long windows."

It was Dickon who spoke. Cypher looked at him without answering. The flames were spreading fast, licking hungrily toward the cane. They might have to fight their way clear, though the side of the island where the ship awaited them was but sparsely inhabited.

"Get into the carriage, Dickon," said Cypher. "The lady may hold some wild idea of throwing herself out of the door as we go through the pass. See that she doesn't. I hold you responsible."

Dickon obeyed. For a second he hesitated as he opened the door and met her gaze. But Cypher was watching him and he stepped in.

The horses went swiftly, ahead of the rest. It was very dark and the driver cursed the roughness of the road. Dickon could not see her in the blackness, yet every sense seemed saturated with her presence. How wonderful she was, he thought, how soft, yet how strong. He had seen traces of tears when he got into the carriage. She had winked them back but he had read the signs of grief aright.

Now she was sobbing quietly and he longed to comfort her but dared not, partly because of his fear of Cypher, partly because of his poet's shyness toward the first woman he had ever come near who in the least way resembled his ideal.

The wind quickened. In the pass it blew so hard that the negro bearers could hardly struggle against it. The stars were hidden by flying scud. Behind them the fire was raging through the cane, upflinging great flakes of flame that were carried far on the wind.

"It looks as if it was working to a hurricane," said Cypher.

"Aye," answered Silent Sam. "Foremast."

"We'll make for the little cay. Send some one ahead to have the boats ready. Listen."

They stood on the side hill as the men,

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torch-lighted, marched by at a rapid swing. A sudden gap had come in the gale, lasting only a few seconds before the wind raged with redoubled force. In it they heard the sound of horses galloping.

Half a mile of steep incline down a ragged ravine lay between them and the beach when the first of the pursuit caught up with them. Bullets began to sing about and among them, and now and then a man dropped and was hauled along by his comrades. The pirates started to run, driving the carriers ahead, Cypher cursing at his lack of firearms. The carriage was waiting on the beach when he arrived and, dragging the girl out in no gentle fashion, he forced her into the first boat which carried him swiftly to the schooner, riding to anchors fore and aft in the little harbor.

The seas were mounting in sympathy with the increasing wind, running in a welter of cross currents. Cypher sent back the boat with instructions for the rest to keep clear and, self-training his rear-chaser on the head of the ravine, dropped a scattering load of partridge among the governor's men, following it up with another, covering the embarcation of the pirates.

For a few minutes the pursuers fired at the wretched blacks in mistake before they tried to reach the schooner at the limit of their fusil range, then gave up the attempt as *The Nameless* slipped her anchors and, with tossing bow, clawed her way beyond the point and tacked with started sheets, scudding through the dark night, the men working frantically to reef in the face of the coming storm.

Cypher sent the girl below with Dickon still in charge of her, under strict injunctions to watch her lest she do herself an injury. He was needed on deck. Thunder was crashing and wide flares of lightning showed the troubled masses of cloud pregnant with wind and rain. The hurricane was at hand and he feared for the fished foremast.

The fire throbbed on the hills, a far-flung beacon of distress, threatening to destroy the leeward half of the island. The men who had pursued them were in danger of being cut off. Cypher chuckled at the thought.

Half the horizon showed sudden-clear under a burst of rampant electricity. Plunging through the seas, running before the gale under the drive of lower sails alone, smothered at every plunge, the *Thetis* showed plainly in the flare, heading up for the island. The frigate's commander had realized the futility of finding the pirate schooner with a hurricane at hand and the crimson blaze that glowed on the storm clouds above Bridgetown brought him back, driving with every inch of canvas that he dared to set.

It was impossible to guess whether the watch aboard the frigate had seen or recognized *The Nameless*, running low in the trough of the fifteen-foot seas. The lightning winked out and, as at a signal, the rain came down with the hiss and rush of a cascade, blotting out sight and other sound though it failed to deaden the force of the wind that flung the spouting sheets aboard in tumbling walls of water that flooded the scuppers and buried the rail.

There was a second's lull and then a gust that smashed the foremast ten feet above the deck where the shot from the merchantman had weakened it. With staysails dragging overboard, the foresail thrashing like some wounded leviathan of a bird, the pound of the seas and the roar and hiss of the gale, the crew stood irresolute. The schooner fell off, her helm useless against the leverage of the water amid the wreckage.

Cypher jumped forward, driving his men before him, axes and cutlases in hand to cut away the litter. A clumsy sea anchor was constructed out of the ruin of the foresail and *The Nameless* swung slowly head on to the seas.

Twenty men fought with the mainsail sheets, struggling to prevent a jibe. Wave after wave broke crashing on her decks as the pirates, clinging like leeches, strove, under Silent Sam's terse directions, to effect some kind of jury headsail.

A peal of thunder roared angrily across the arch of the zenith and lightning, palled by the rain, glared blue. Cypher, by the stump of the foremast, tore out a handful of his hair and tossed it skyward.

"Good devil, take this till I come," he shouted.

The storm shredded the syllables as they passed his lips, but some of the nearest caught their meaning. Within ten minutes they had worked out of the main path of the hurricane and Cypher's dealings with Satan were a thing confirmed.

It took consummate seamanship to guide the schooner through the ravening seas

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under the clumsy jury-rig, but early dawn found them off the little cay and sunrise safe in the lagoon.

Cypher descended to the cabin. The girl lay on the cushions of a transom seat, asleep. Dickon had taken off the belt that bound her arms. Her hair had loosened and fell about her face. The poet sat near by, watching her in admiration.

Cypher laughed at his minstrel's rapt face.

"Mayhap you'll win her, lad," he said. "You'll have your throw with the rest."

"I? Win her?"

His captain nodded.

"Why not? She is a part of the loot. Throw boldly and, if ye cast the double-sixes we'll make a full man of ye yet."

Dickon's loose lips tightened a little and there was a gleam in his eye that Cypher misread as he turned into his own cabin. The half-wit leaned over the exhausted girl.

"Why not?" he said. "Why not? I would not harm her."

A flush of incipient manhood crept into his cheeks, haggard from the nausea that had racked him through the storm.

"The double-sixes. I must throw them. None of the others must have her. If Silent Sam—"he shuddered at the picture conjured up by the thought and his hands balled—"I wonder," he muttered, "whether 'twould help to pray?"

CHAPTER V

DRAYTON

"THE MURDERING villains! Hastings dead, his sister half demented with grief, his daughter carried off, his plantation burned to sills and roots! My authority made a byword in the Indies and at home! Bearded in my own domain, made a mock, a laughing stock! Ye passed them in the storm, ye say, and yet they escaped!"

The governor was trembling with rage, purple of face, his pendulous cheeks quivering as he blustered up and down his library. The commander of the *Thetis* glanced at Manning significantly. The governor seemed more concerned over his own place and reputation than the actual commission of the deed and its ghastly result.

"I am prepared to accept all responsibility for not capturing the schooner last night," said the captain of the king's frigate. "It was by your own urgent request, sir, that I put out from Bridgetown yesterday. A midnight sea with a hurricane blowing is a certain handicap, sir, that ye do not appear to appreciate. Give me the sloops ye promised and we will hunt the rogue to his lair."

"Ye shall have them. Your choice of a dozen this very afternoon. I will arrange with the owners. Ye need two?"

"I shall command one myself, governor, and Lieutenant Manning the other."

The governor glanced at Manning whose face was graven into grim resolve at the paramount thought of the girl in the clutches of the pirates.

"To think," he said, "to think that the rogue was aboard the frigate and that blundering fool of mine recognized him—after he was gone! And he Captain Cypher! Had I laid clutches on him I would have hanged him higher than Haman!"

"What was his special grudge against the Hastings family?" asked the commander. "Mr. Manning tells me they had some cause to hate if not to fear him."

"Aye, cause enough, the villain. He came here, from Virginia, so he said, four years ago. He spoke plausibly, he dressed well, he showed the veneer of gentility. He foisted himself upon John Gaylord, a planter well esteemed and wealthy. It is thought he may have had some hold upon Gaylord other than the one ye shall hear of. Much came out after all was over. Gaylord apparently vouched for him and he was well received and lorded it with the best.

"Rumors cropped up now and then, of drinking bouts with the riff-raff of the taverns, of consorting with drabs and pimps, but Drayton ruffled it well and won much favor for liberality and good-humor. And all the time he played on Gaylord as one would upon a harp. Gaylord, ye must know, was a man well over sixty and he had suffered from a stroke of sun. Belike it had weakened him, belike he did not sense rightly all that was going on.

"From the first Drayton cocked his hat at Elizabeth Hastings. The two plantations adjoined. Hastings and Gaylord were close friends. While they played chess the villain made love to the lass. As I have it, Drayton proposed and the girl refused him. She was but seventeen.

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"Now mark the cunning of the rogue. He had bled his patron freely and he made up his mind to secure the dower of the girl and, later, her heritage. So he took his refusal smilingly and professed to have turned his passion into friendship. I doubt whether either Hastings or Gaylord knew aught of the affair. Hastings had a villa by the shore beyond Gull Head where they dwelt between rattan crops for the bathing, and Drayton was a constant visitor, He had a small sloop and he was wont to take the girl a-sailing.

"One twilight he ran the sloop ashore on the shoals at Bird Rocks. 'Tis a lonely part of the coast and he chose his spot well between the seaward crags. They were forced, or so he persuaded the girl at least, to spend the night there. They got off on the morning flood and returned to the villa in broad daylight, Drayton professing wondrous penitence.

"As he had schemed it, all the island was abuzz. A young girl's reputation is a tender thing. Drayton offered the only possible reparation that society demanded—immediate marriage. Hastings approved. Doubtless the girl was not consulted.

"But this last Gaylord would not put up with. Drayton had already robbed him and forged his name and Gaylord's manhood would not permit the wedding to go on, without Hastings knowing what he knew. He saw Hastings and told the truth thought it cost him sore. Drayton was his natural son!

"Hastings took his rapier but Drayton had hid in some spot whence he crept back at night to the Gaylord plantation. The next morning Gaylord was found with his skull crushed. Money and jewels were gone and so was Drayton in his sailboat.

"I need not tell ye of the hue and cry. We found no trace of him save the wreckage of what was thought to be his sloop. There was a great storm that night and it appeared as if he must have perished, sailing single-handed, good seaman as he was known to be."

"And the girl?" asked Manning.

"She poor lass, was tainted. First the gossip, then the slights which even I could not prevent though I put her under my especial patronage. She drooped and shut herself up at the plantation as if in a convent. She was a proud one and she held her head high but smiles and sneers are keen weapons that leave rankling wounds, gentlemen. Hastings took her back to England and left her there. Mayhap the scandal followed her. Last month she returned and the damnable gossip-mongers hissed once more."

Manning saw once more the girl in the dusky hall and heard her plea. "I have no brother. Kill him for me. Kill Drayton." His blood boiled at thought of the hellish atmosphere engendered from the venomous breaths of the island gossips that had surrounded her. It quickened his wits toward action.

"Mayhap the governor can requisition us some fishermen or turtlers who are familiar with these seas," he said to the commander. "There are many cays that our charts know nothing of. We can comb them until we scrape these vermin up."

"A good thought, sir. It can be done, governor?"

"I will put it in hand. My secretary will attend ye concerning the sloops. And God speed ye."

"The girl is beautiful, ye said, Manning?" asked the commander as they awaited the secretary.

Manning gave no direct answer.

"All I ask is to come to hand-grips with the murdering cur," he said. "Then, may the Lord have mercy on his soul for I shall send it whimpering to the Judgment seat."

His superior looked at him sharply, noting the change that had brought a sudden aging to his junior's face.

Small doubt of her beauty, he told himself. But I fear me Manning will find it sadly marred, if indeed he ever looks upon her face again.

CHAPTER VI

DICE

THE Nameless was in jeopardy. The cays were too close to Barbados to be a safe retreat and Cypher shrewdly guessed the preparations that would be put in hand for his capture. A dragnet would be drawn over the Antilles. At Cypher Cay, well to the southward, he had a fort that could stand any siege that was likely to be brought against it and the place was protected by a maze of shallows and mangrove-bordered channels. Meanwhile he lay with a broken foremast, helpless as a

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gull with a broken wing, with no timber for repairs bigger than the sappy trunk of a coco-palm.

But the devil's own luck still held for his protégé. The hurricane had caught a turtler in his sloop and had flung the vessel, ripped and battered, high on the shore of a nearby reef. The turtler had been swept overboard or drowned in a struggle to reach land. His craft was hopelessly damaged but the mast still held and Silent Sam grinned as a pirate announced the discovery and the apparent dimensions of the new stick. It would make a stumpy but practicable foremast for *The Nameless*.

The entire crew were turned to work. Eighty seamen handling a job in their own line and urged by a powerful sense of their danger can do wonders. The mast was stepped and stayed before the afternoon shadows began to appreciably lengthen. Canvas had been feverishly wrought into foresail, staysail and jib. Sheets and halyards were rove and the schooner was ready to sneak out of the lagoon and run to Cypher Cay as soon as dusk was well down.

The crew, exhausted from the tussle with the hurricane and the stepping of the mast, flung themselves on the sandy strips beneath the palms to wait until sundown. They fought off sleep in the excitement of the division of the loot from the merchantman and the plantation.

Each put in his gleanings to a general pile presided over by Captain Cypher and, as the crew's representative, Silent Sam. There was no withholding. Jealous eyes would sooner or later note the display of undeclared treasure and for such dishonor among thieves there was but one penalty—death.

Wines and liquors were common property. Jewelry, plate, gold and silver, swords, pistols, bales of silk, brocades, anything that held value or struck the looter's fancy—one pirate had borne off Hastings' stick of ebony—were placed in equal lots and the dice thrown for first choice. Even Cypher took his turn at chance before he made his selection, though twenty shares were his to every one for the crew. Dickon had two, as poet.

The dicing proceeded rapidly, with occasional ties and petty wrangling, decided by Cypher. The cubes were tossed on the lid of a big sea-chest set between Cypher and Silent Sam, which acted as counter for display and table for division. The sand was strewn with empty wine bottles, and the fatigue, the sun and the heady liquors had made the men riotous.

One magnificent pearl necklace, once the property of Hastings' sister, was left to the last. The gems were exquisitely matched and the pirates waited while Silent Sam cut the string that tied them and counted the pearls with clumsy fingers, Cypher sat watching him with half-closed eyes. There were few of the crew but did did not see two shining globules where but one was set. Silent Sam held his potations almost as well as did his captain. Dickon alone was utterly sober, gnawing at his nails and praying for Fate to be kind to him when the time came to cast for the big stake, as yet unannounced by Cypher.

"Thirteen—fourteen—" Sam's digits pawed at the pearls, counting painfully—"Thirty-two in all," he announced.

A murmur arose. It was going to be a hard matter for division. There would be six for the captain, twenty-six left for the rest of them, a third of a pearl apiece.

"Thirty-five," said Cypher in even tones.

His lids had lifted and his icy eyes glittered.

"Thirty-two," persisted Silent Sam. "Count 'em an ye will."

Cypher snatched something from his belt too swiftly for the eye to follow anything but a curving flash that arched the impromptu table and ended at Sam's left hand. The quartermaster cursed and gazed at his gnarled member, pinned by a slender poniard to the top of the chest, like a butterfly to a strip of cork. The hilt still quivered, the blade driven five inches through flesh and bone and wood by the sudden force of Cypher's blow.

"You dog," said the pirate captain. "You treacherous cur! So, you would cheat your comrades! Pluck out the blade, one of you, and see what he holds beneath his palm."

Heavy hands were set upon Sam's shoulders. The boatswain jerked loose the dagger and lifted the helpless fingers, disclosing, stained with blood, three pearls.

A drunken hubbub arose, topped by Cypher's voice, subdued by the sight of his ready pistols.

"I settle this," he roared. "What have ye to say for yourself?"

Silent Sam looked round the circle of

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fierce faces. They had elected him their quartermaster and he had betrayed their trust. But once he had a hold on them. A bold thrust might yet save him.

"Say?" he growled as with sound hand and his teeth he bound his dripping hand up in his grimy neckerchief. "Why, 'tis soon told. I cheated not my comrades. These pearls were for them."

"A likely story," sneered Cypher and the men guffawed.

"Likely enough. If any have cheated, 'tis not I. Ye have had your full score of shares from each deal, ha' ye not?"

"And why not, you dog."

"Ah, but what of the beauty you hold in the cabin? Where is our share in her? Ye said naught of that when ye made division. So these pearls I held for our share to even the tale."

To the drunken crowd the argument appealed. There had been murmurings about the disposition of the girl but the excitement of the present apportionment had allayed them. Now eyes began to leer and sensuous pulses to throb heavily. Sam saw his advantage.

"Why should ye hold the best and take full share of the rest?" he asked.

A brawny pirate, the veins swollen in his neck, swaying on bowed legs, snatched up a sword that had fallen to his share from the loot of the merchantmen.

"Ye speak sooth," he bellowed. "'Tis we who have been cheated."

Cypher had risen and stood facing the rabble, a sneer on his thin lips. Backed by his comrades, the pirate lurched toward him. The childish brains of the crew, acting to but one emotion at a time, slow to grasp a thought and slower to relinquish it, knew only that somehow they had been cheated. The liquor fermenting in them offset their awe of Cypher. They saw him through a haze that dulled the chilling gaze they usually dreaded. Weapons flashed, the gritty sand scraped beneath their rush.

Two puffs of white smoke hung in the air and two crisp reports blended. The bow-legged pirate fell with a red star between his eyebrows where Cypher's bullet had sunk to the brain. Another dropped across him, shot through the temple. The rest halted and drew slowly back at the sight of two inches of steel protruding between the shoulder-blades of a third.

Cypher withdrew his blade and the pirate toppled forward, his clenching fingers buried in the sand that filled his mouth and glazing eyes. The leader stood easily, his blade resting on a boulder, the finely tempered steel slightly bowed, ready to flash out in a springy lunge, red globules standing on its blued surface in a sweat of death.

"You dogs!" his even tones sounded in the sudden silence, "know ye not that no living man can harm me? Take away that carrion and bind that blundering fool."

He pointed to Sam while his syllables lashed them.

"'Tis said that I have sold my soul to Satan," he went on. "Shall I give him more of yours to play with—or will three suffice?"

The cold eyes laughed at them beneath the black line of brows, the hooked nose menaced, the thin lips, triangled to the angles of the beak with sardonic lines, seemed a mask of the devil himself. They shrank back, cowed, defeated, bearing Sam with them and cording him to the stem of a palm.

"Ask Dickon here what is to be done with the girl," he said. "I hold no share in her. She is the stake for which you are to throw. Speak, Dickon, was it not so arranged?"

The poet stepped forward.

"So ye said last night," he said.

A roar went up from the fickle mob of them, cheers and protestations of regret and misunderstanding. Cypher sneered as he watched them.

"One of ye go with Dickon," he ordered, "and bring her from the cabin."

ELIZABETH HASTINGS, white to the lips that were firmly closed above a steadfast chin, stood in the ring of the drunken brutes who closed about her with coarse appraisals. She looked at them steadily. The light in her eyes held a serene contempt before which they flinched. It was the look that many of them had seen in the orbs of a captured sea-bird, the untamable, fearless gaze of a sea-eagle, imprisoned but invincible, the same look that had seared the callous soul of Cypher himself.

She said nothing but measured them and held up to them a mirror in which they saw a glimpse of their own black-spotted, decaying manhood.

"Come," said Cypher. "There is the prize. What, are ye afraid to win her?"

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Some of them muttered and hung back. Others pressed forward to clutch the dice-box. Dickon stood beside her, his nails sunk in his palms.

"Courage," he whispered when sure that Cypher's gaze was averted. "Courage! I shall win the cast and ye shall be free from harm."

"Courage?" she replied in the same low tone. "If ye are a man and have any, give me a knife, anything."

"I dare not," he said. "'Twould do no good. Nor have I——"

He broke off as Cypher turned and looked at them.

"'Tis your turn, Dickon," he said.

The lad approached the chest and took up the dice-box with trembling hands. The men crowded 'round him with jests.

"Nine is the highest cast, Dickon!" "Speak to the bones and win a bride!"

The dice dropped to the lid. One fell with a six uppermost. Dickon's heart leaped, then fell as the second cube rolled to the edge of the chest and dropped to the sand.

"A false main!"

"And 'twas a six!"

"The high throw."

Some one picked up the dice and once more Dickon rattled them in the leather cylinder. They settled to a roar of derisive laughter. The poet had thrown a deuce and an ace!

They thrust him back, loose-lipped once more and staring at the cubes as the next gambler gathered them up. Two men threw the double-sixes and threw once more to decide the main. The winner, whose rascally face was seamed with a scar that twisted his features awry, thrust aside the others and advanced toward the girl, squinting at her evilly, his tongue tucked into a corner of his tobacco-stained lips.

"Come, my beauty," he said.

"If you raise a finger to me," said the girl, "I think you will never see the sun rise again." She spoke in an unemotional voice the more effective because of its dispassionate, impersonal quality.

The pirate halted his advance, looking at her half in fear, half in amaze.

"I can see ye now," she went on, "as Death clutches you and the slow palsy creeps upon ye. Ye can not see behind ye or we would know that your fate lies in your shadow. Nay, move not, and let the rest tell ye what shape it takes."

The man stood with head thrust forward from his wide shoulders, his arms dangling close to his squat body, his feet together, and the afternoon sun threw a shadow on the ground that scarcely needed the suggestion of the girl's words to impress its outline upon the superstitious pirates.

"It is the shadow of a coffin," said the girl.

The winner of the stake looked uneasily over his shoulder and at the staring faces of his comrades some of whom murmured:

"Aye, a coffin!" "'Ware the witch!"

"Do ye know why your captain gave me to ye?" The girl gathered fresh courage as she saw her advantage. "Because he is himself afraid of me. Because he knows I hold no fear of him—nor of any of ye. The shadow of the gallows is upon ye all! Behind the flesh of your faces I see the hollow skulls sealed with the mocking grin of death. Ye are accursed!"

She lifted her hand in threatening gesture and the whole circle shifted as wolves will when a brand is tossed on the fire."

"I want none of her," muttered the man, twisting uneasily to catch a glimpse of his shadow.

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

Dickon stepped forward but Cypher thrust him rudely back.

"Why, since none of ye want her," he said with a misshapen grin though he avoided the look of the girl and hurried his words, noting that the men saw his own unwillingness to meet the issue, "we must be well rid of her. Sam is the only one who has seemed to wish for her. We will set them both ashore on some lonely cay where she can work her witcheries on the quartermaster."

The idea caught the fancy of the pirates. Cypher watched them, eager for the first spark of approval to fan it into a flame. The phrases of the voodoo witch rang in his ears.

"Women shall be your bane. One woman who has passed and who will come again!"

Sentences that had burned deep revived the hurt that had smoldered for long, the words the girl herself had spoken to him when she had seen through his trick and a forced marriage stared her in the face.

"Aye, maroon the two of them together," said Ned, the boatswain, spokesman for the rest. "'Twill be a good riddance!"

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AT DAWN, fifty miles to the south, *The Nameless* came up into the wind off a long bank of shoals. Here and there the sand and coral humped itself, barely awash at high-water mark, and undergrowth gathered together in clumps. A boat put off from the schooner and landed Elizabeth Hastings and the discredited quartermaster, dumping beside them a kid of beef, some biscuits and a small keg. Dickon had sought to be of the landing party. At the last he had offered to be marooned in the place of Silent Sam but Cypher had laughed at him.

"I could ill spare my song-bird," he said. "Get ye below."

The pirate schooner filled and sailed on south, leaving the two, the tender girl and the hardened pirate, hungering for revenge, standing on the margin of the tide.

Silent Sam shook his sound fist at the schooner.

"Ye murdering villains," he cried. "May your blood turn to fire and your bones rot in your flesh!"

His glance fell on the keg.

"Water," he muttered. "A lucky stroke. There is none on this sandbank. 'Tis not like Cypher to be so merciful."

He tapped the keg with a blow from a lump of hard coral and his nostrils dilated.

"Brandy!" he shouted.

Then his face turned to a scowl as he realized the devilish plan of Cypher, to leave them on a shadeless bank, waterless save for the sea, with salt-beef, dry biscuits and brandy for their food.

"'Twill be a short shrift," he said turning to the girl. "We may as well make it a merry one, mistress."

She watched him with eyes that filled with fear as he sought and found a shell and filled it with the brandy, squinting at her as he drank.

CHAPTER VII

MANNING

Eas-y-y! Eas-y-y!
Easy, my man, easy-y-y!
Bully in Shin-Bone Alley-y!
Give him a drink, for he's just come to town!

THE hairy-chested, bronze-skinned sailors of the king, their hair clubbed in cues, muscles standing out on brawny arms and backs, tailed to the mainsheet of the sugar-sloop *Alert*, requisitioned by the governor of Barbados on his Majesty's service and commanded by Lieutenant Manning.

The sloop was fast and well handled. There were seventy men aboard of her and she was practically man-ballasted. They slept and ate as they could and they jumped at their work like the crew of a Challenge Cup defender. With a fair breeze on the quarter she went creaming through the blue seas under a smother of canvas, extra jibs and a balloon staysail with a big topsail that tugged at the mainstays and bent the mast like a whip under the urge of the wind.

It was a trip after every man's heart. Pirates to kill and prize-money to share! The *Alert* and another sugar-sloop, the *Caprice*, had been armed and manned from the frigate with carronades, swivel-toms for bow and stern, small-arms and hand grenades. It was perhaps the look he had seen on his junior's face that had led the commander to offer Manning his choice of sailing north or sailing south. It was a kindly thing to do although the ultimate honor, should Cypher be captured, would lie with the commander.

And Manning had chosen to go south. Since Drayton had been discovered to be the pirate leader himself, it was natural to suppose that he had given false information as to the relative position of Cypher Cay.

Manning had aboard as pilot a man named Turtler Tom, who, in his younger days, had brought to justice the redoubtable Captain Bane, after that villain had caused the death of the turtler's young wife. Tom the Turtler was gray and grim and taciturn but he told Manning somewhat of his own experience and the lieutenant's lines of resolution deepened as he thought of the fate that might—it seemed rather that must already—have descended upon her.

Cypher should pay for it with the inevitable forfeit—his life. It was inconceivable that they would find her still unharmed yet in his heart Manning, remembering the spirit that had shone from the girl's eyes, cherished a hope that it might be so. He did not disguise from himself that it was his heart rather than his brain that nourished this constant prayer.

The something kindred that had passed from each of them and blended into that greater mystery called love was as palpable to him as the spark that leaps from two electrodes. Their meeting had been brief,

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tragic—with her plea to him to act as her avenger—it had lacked all the setting that he had vaguely dreamed of as the prelude to his heart's surrender, yet she had appealed to him and in their glance they had gaged each other's souls and known them subject to the same reactions, formed of the same elements.

"Kill Drayton," she had begged. Aye, he would kill Drayton, if he had to resign his commission and spend his life searching the Caribbean Cays.

Tom the Turtler knew the Antilles as a child knows its alphabet, learning them as the youngster cons its A-B, abs. Many of them he had not exploited but he set them down as he held them in the map of his memory upon an extra chart which Manning conned anxiously as the two bent over it on the second day out from Bridgetown. The course was set for the group in which lay the hair-pin cay vacated by Cypher thirty-six hours before. The palm-tops were already sighted and the *Alert* headed up for them like a hound upon the scent, the foam flung from her bows like the slaver that drips from eager jaws.

Manning, beneath the stern behavior of his manhood, was sensitive. Since he had heard the governor's tale he had reviewed with keen appreciation the position of Elizabeth Hastings after the night spent upon the Gull Rocks with Drayton. She had been robbed of her girlhood, sneered at, whispered about, slighted, tainted with innuendo that had followed her to England and lain in wait for her return.

He could imagine the wrath that had slowly consumed her, searing her natural sweetness, fed ever by the crackling fuel of evil gossip, with no brother to avenge her and a father who, quick in an endeavor to uphold the family honor, yet wanted to force her into marriage.

That she was unstained, Manning was subtly assured. The fact that she had refused Drayton's original offer showed that instinctively she had not fallen under whatever surface fascinations he might have possessed. And for four years she had remained aloof, proud, her heart hardening, impotent—until there came the sudden mention of Drayton's name and Manning himself, an instrument to do what she would have done—had she been a man!

So from the bitter roots of tragedy, romance had sprung though, whether the tender blossoms that might turn to fruition had been nipped in the bud by Cypher's last exploit, time alone could disclose.

The *Alert* dropped anchor where the water shallowed and four boats, the men heavily armed, searched the cluster of cays. They found the turtler's wrecked sloop with the evidence of the foremast having been removed, they found the beach of the hairpin cay littered with smashed wine bottles and trodden with footprints and the tale was plain to read.

Manning restrained his men from destroying the footsign until he had examined it. His heart contracted as he saw the imprint of tiny shoes that told him the girl had been ashore.

"Back to the ship, men!" he shouted and the coxswains passed on the call "They have used the sloop's mast for their foremast," he said. "This stump went in the storm."

He walked closer to the discarded stump to examine the evidence while his men got the boat into the ebbing water, and stopped with an exclamation. The men killed by Cypher had been hastily buried and the land-crabs had uncovered them in their feast.

"There's been mutiny of some sort," he said, wondering whether the quarrel had aught to do with the girl.

At all events Cypher seemed to have conquered.

The boats raced back to the sloop. They had caught the scent. Ten minutes sufficed to sling them to the davits and, the breeze holding free and strong, the *Alert* took up the trail once more.

It was late in the afternoon when, against the clear greenish-blue of the eastern horizon, Manning saw puffs of brown smoke rising on the port bow. He turned to Tom the Turtler.

"What make ye of that?" he asked. "A ship afire? The smoke is scanty for that, unless she is down to the water-line and nearly burned out."

Tom took the telescope and looked long before he returned it.

"I can see no hull," he said. "But somewhere in this neighborhood there are some shoals, barely awash but growing some scrub. The smoke is strangely regular."

"It might be signals of a sort," said Manning. "We'll bear up for the shoals."

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CHAPTER VIII

CALIBAN

SILENT SAM lay asleep beneath the noon sun, his face empurpled, hideous, the brandy keg emptied of half a gallon of its ardent contents. Elizabeth Hastings crouched twenty feet away. Every few minutes she would drag herself a little closer to the drunken pirate, stopping at the least shift of position or change in the steady snores that came from the open mouth.

She was pitilessly sun-burned by the merciless rays beating upon the sand, refracted, intensified by the white grit that scorched her hands and her limbs through her light clothing. Her tongue had commenced to swell from lack of water, her lips were cracking.

Her eyes held the horror born of her helplessness. Twice she had fled fleet-footed from the quartermaster. The second time he had tripped in the undergrowth and hurt his wounded hand. In his sleep it seemed to pain him and Elizabeth could see the forearm was swollen and darkened above the grimy neckerchief that he had used as bandage. In time the brandy, the sun, the absence of dressing, would cause blood-poisoning, meanwhile the festering wound goaded him to more drink. While the keg lasted she was safe—until nightfall.

Though the vertical beams tortured her tender flesh and the *lap-lap* of the water tempted her to drink the brine in desperation, the girl dreaded the passing of the hours. The curses and foul phrases of the fallen pirate still rang in her ears. When the darkness came there would commence a hideous game of hide-and-seek, her honor as the stake. At the last she resolved to drown herself—unless she could secure the weapons that Cypher, by chance or malice, had left in the quartermaster's belt.

She could see the sparkle of the sun on the brass mountings of a brace of pistols and the ivory handle of a knife.

Foot by foot Elizabeth crept onward until they were within the reach of her hand.

Her weary head dropped in sudden despair. A crimson sash of grease-spotted silk was wound above the belt. As the pirate lay, his bloated stomach expanded, stretching taut the folds of the sash, she saw the hopelessness of her attempt. The outlines of the weapons were molded beneath the material. It would take actual force to remove them. It would be impossible to do so without awakening the sleeping Caliban. With but one hand he was more than a match for her most desperate resistance.

Silent Sam slumbered on, groaning in subconsciousness of the throbbing pain from the stab, and the girl watched with eyes that ached from the glare, hoping against hope that he would change his position. Elizabeth did not want to die. She clung desperately to the feeble hope that Manning would find her. She knew that the frigate had passed them in the storm—Dickon had told her that—and that pursuit would be organized.

But they would search for the pirate schooner, not for her. If ever they discovered where she was it would be too late. Yet she hoped on, pinning her faith to the resolution she had seen in Manning's glance. Her plea to him was enforced now by his duty. Sooner or later he would come.

There was no way of escape from the sand-bank. The shoals lay all about, the languid foam almost submerging them, gulls screaming over them. Beyond the sailless, landless sea.

Ineffable weariness dragged at her. Her eyes seemed rimmed with burning ash. She could barely maintain her crouch and all the time the sun sapped her failing strength and sucked the moisture from her tissues. The blood seemed boiling in her veins.

If she could hold on? Rain might come. It was likely at that season. There was the beef and the biscuits. With rain-water she could live a long while. Some sort of shade shelter might be made from the brush. After she had killed Silent Sam. That act—it was no crime—seemed vitally necessary.

Her head sagged like a wilting flower. Sam's snores seemed far away. Her arms lost their strength and she sank in a limp heap beside the snoring pirate.

Something warned her, something that summoned the reserves of her strength and she awoke. Sam was sitting up, looking at her with bloodshot eyes that blinked slowly back to maudlin consciousness. Blood broke through cracks on his lips as he tried to grin and he smeared it over his chin. Then he reached for his shell and turned to the keg. She rose, to her wavering knees, to her burning feet and retreated.

The sun had dropped far to the sea-rim.

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Its power had gone, a tiny breeze rustled the scrub and fanned her blistered face. Clouds were gathering for a sunset panoply. In thirty minutes it would be dark.

"To we two, mistress."

The words were barely articulate, the gutturals of a brute. Sam grunted as he got to his feet and stood slowly, swaying. The lowering sun turned his eyes crimson, the cruelty of a beast—and something worse—shone in them. He assayed a drunken laugh and lurched toward her as with desperate remnants of strength she ran from him between the dunes.

Elizabeth heard him call to her to stop, then curse. A pistol cracked and the bullet whipped by her. They were in a little valley between wind-rippled hills of sand, crested with tangled verdure. To her left the dune was rimmed with the last rays of the sun. Over the rest of the bank a velvet dusk was settling down that would be utter darkness in a few moments.

She held on with faltering strides, unbearable pain centering at the nape of her neck, the taste of blood from her over-driven heart in her mouth, and rounded the dune as the pirate fired again. Like a sheltering veil the tropic darkness fell, spangled with stars that turned it to a purple twilight. She shrank into a clump of sea-shrubs and saw the dim shape of the quartermaster blundering past. His oaths died away. He had missed her for the moment. She lay inert, save for the pound of her pulses and the troubled lift of her breast.

Half an hour passed and the sky brightened. The moon was rising. It was at the full. By its light the brute could beat the bank until he found her like a wounded hare in its form. As the dazzle of its rim lifted she heard him coming back. It was the end.

Elizabeth sped down to the water and waded in, out till the lagoon embraced her waist and rose to her breasts. Its comparative coolness revived her and restored the trembling balance of her courage. A rock confronted her, throwing a moon-shadow beachward. Fronds of seaweed trailed about her as her feet struck a ledge at its base where it was deeply cleft. She waded into the notch, chin-deep, and draped the kelp about her head as Sam came from the dunes to the sand, following her footsteps to the water's edge.

The ripples of her movement were merged in the current. He stared stupidly seaward and scratched his head.

"Drowned herself, blast her," he muttered. "Preferred Davy Jones to poor old Sam!" He hiccoughed and staggered. "Let her lie for a cold-blooded wench! There's the more food for Sam. Aye and brandy! I would ha' shared it wi' her but she's cheated me, the sly-eyed witch. I'll to the brandy, lass. The salt sea's in your gullet."

He turned and went off, singing drunkenly:

> Ho, yo-ho! Red wine in a glass!
> Better by far than the arms o' a lass.
> Easier far to replenish.
> Cull a flow'r from the grass,
> So her beauty will pass.
> Ho, pledge me a flagon o' Rhenish!
> O' Rhenish!
> Then pledge me a flagon o' Rhenish!

The hoarse, hiccoughing voice died away as Sam returned to his brandy keg. The girl stayed in the cleft, her body grateful for the laving of the water. The tide rose and she found a higher foothold. Clouds had gathered and the moon was dimmed. The air had changed and held a savor of rain. It grew darker and she ventured back to the shore again before the tide drove her to swim. Big drops splashed into the water, pitting it. She held her face up to them as she waded.

The moon was scudding now through gray masses, giving intermittent light. By it she reached the beach and found a shallow shell. The rain gave promise of a heavy downpour and she feverishly scooped the salt-water from a pool on the top of a boulder. Once filled it would serve as a reservoir and there would be other hollows that would hold rain-water for a long time. She could prevent evaporation by covering them.

Before she had finished her task the clouds burst, drenching her in a moment, battering the sand and hissing in the lagoon. She licked the water that trickled down her cheeks and scooped it up from the pool with her shell, gaining fresh life with every drop.

For half an hour the torrent descended and then stopped abruptly. The moon began to break through the dissipating scud. Above the soft rush of the surf she listened for sounds of Sam and, hearing nothing, invigorated by the water, she found the little valley between the dunes

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and slunk through the shadows to the other side of the bank, sneaking her way through a mass of sopping brush and looking down at last upon the spot where the keg had lain. There was a dark mass beside it, prone on the sand.

Inch by inch she crept down once more. For the moment she thought the pirate dead as she stood above his sodden bulk. He had ceased to snore but he was breathing heavily. The keg was on its side. No liquor ran from where Sam had broken in the bung but the reek of it was plain and the quartermaster was in a stupor.

Elizabeth squatted by him, half fearful. The brandy had vanquished him. He was practically unconscious. She ventured to lift the arm that lay across his body, then, emboldened, worked at the fastening of his sash. The rain made the knots difficult but the liquor had destroyed the drunkard's senses and she finally managed to loosen the folds. Presently she rose triumphant with the weapons in her hands. The pistols had been reprimed and capped. She fastened the knife in her belt and placed one pistol in the bosom of her gown, carrying the other.

The pirate did not stir. Elizabeth rolled the keg along the sand. There was a little brandy left in it and she held it in position until the last dregs gurgled out. The case of biscuits was easily broken. Sam had not touched the food but she made a strengthening meal.

AT DAWN the mounting sun rapidly sucked up the moisture from the undergrowth until the sandbanks steamed. As the local mist cleared, Elizabeth, wan, weary but resolute, clinging to wakefulness after restless hours of fitful dozing, saw the topsails of a vessel lift above the western horizon, hold there for a few minutes, then disappear.

If she had been able to make some signal the ship might have taken her off. She looked at the sleeping Sam. Perhaps he had steel and flint and tinder about him. If so, the brush would burn. They must establish and keep up a perpetual fire. If they burned all the fuel on this bank they must wade or swim to another. When the beef and biscuits went, shellfish must satisfy them.

She rebound her hair, found a depression that held some rain, ate some beef and biscuits and resumed her seat on the keg, pistol ready, waiting for Silent Sam, already tossing in his sleep, to regain consciousness.

So he found her, his befuddled senses slowly taking in the situation. His arm was badly swollen and discolored and the throb in it was duplicated in his head. He moved his furry tongue with difficulty and emitted an inarticulate croak that Elizabeth interpreted as "brandy!"

"It has all gone," she said. "You spilled what you did not drink. You will find rain-water in the hollows. After you have had some I will give you a ration of beef and biscuit, then you can set to work and fill up the keg with all the fresh water you can find."

He blinked with bloodshot eyes at the crisp authority of her voice. He started toward her and the muzzle of the pistol lifted unwavering.

"Why, you wouldn't fire that, my pretty," he said hoarsely, his shifty eyes roving in search of a loose boulder to hurl at her while he sidled closer.

"Try it," said Elizabeth, fully determined to shoot. "Go and get some water—but not out of my sight. Try that pool. It is very much in my mind to kill you. But if you obey orders I will feed you and bind and dress your arm afresh. If we do not get off this place within a day or two the poison will kill you anyway. Have you a flint and steel and a tinder-box?"

Sam gazed at her in astonishment. There was no mistaking the fact that she held the whiphand and could and would use it. His nerves were badly shattered and his body weak from his debauch and the need of food. He fumbled in a capacious pocket of his pantaloons and produced a tinder-box of metal and his materials for striking sparks.

"Put them down," she ordered. "Now, go and drink."

When he had found water and lapped it down he came back like a dog that is being taught to retrieve, and gratefully received his ration. There was a look of reluctant admiration in his eyes.

"I suppose you can't manage these with one hand," she said as she took up the fire-making tools. "But you can gather wood and find some dry brush. Bring them here and pile them up. They will be searching for us soon. They may see our signals."

"Aye," he growled, "and swing me to the yard-arm."

"Not if ye tell them where to find Cypher

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Cay," she said. "Have ye no desire for revenge? Did they not leave you wounded to die like a dog without water? As die ye surely will without a surgeon. The sun will set your blood to a fever that will brew the swift poison and carry it to your heart."

"Aye," he muttered. "It clutches there now. Yet mayhap they will have found Cypher before they find us."

"In that case you will be already dead," she said composedly. "Let me see that hand and then get wood."

She dressed the puffed member as best she could, bidding him keep his sound hand behind him and beneath him as he lay on the sand while she washed out the wound first with sea-water and then with fresh.

"You are a rare one," he said as she ordered him to rise. "I'll make a bargain wi' ye. Put in your word for me if any come and find us and I'll tell all I know. Spawn of the devil or not, I'll get even with him."

He worked diligently and soon a pile of the smaller twigs, dried by the fierce downbeat of the sun was assembled on the top of the highest dune. Elizabeth scraped her knuckles raw before she got a spark into the tow and blew it to a flame. At last the fire crackled and Sam kept it to a smoking smolder by feeding it with damp twigs and leaves. After the noon meal he brought up some driftwood and more brush.

"If we sight a ship," he said, "we'll blanket the fire wi' this bush, keeping it wet and send up puff signals, like this.

He showed how to smother the flames and release them with a sudden gush of accumulated smoke.

"We'll take turns to feed the fire and watch," she said. "Go ye to the summit of that sandhill."

The hours dragged toward sunset. Elizabeth was on the dune, her courage slowly sinking as darkness threatened its approach. Sam nodded by the fire. That was the irony of it. He could sleep and she dared not, though a myriad threads seemed tugging at her senses.

Suddenly she gazed into the north. There was the merest fleck of white, lost, then coming again. It held steady and grew little by little. She cried to Sam and soon the fire was sending up jet after jet of brown smoke like the intermittent puffs of a miniature volcano. The pirate shaded his eyes and looked to sea.

"'Tis a sloop," he announced. "She's holding on—no, by God, she sees us! She's changed her course. She heads this way."

The vessel came up before a spanking breeze. A mile from the bank she fired a gun. The flag at her peak flared crimson in the level rays of the sinking sun.

"She's a king's ship," said Sam. "Give me a good word and I'll put them on the right track."

Where the water shallowed the sloop came into the wind and dropped a boat that came, with well-timed, vigorous oarstrokes, swiftly toward the shore where the girl stood with her pale face once more alight with hope. It grew radiant in the sunset as the boat's keel touched and Manning jumped into the light surf and came toward her.

She stood upright to receive him, trying to fight off the dizziness of reaction.

"I knew you'd come," she said unsteadily.

The last word was a whisper as she swooned and Manning, leaping forward, caught her in his arms.

CHAPTER IX

CYPHER CAY

MANNING looked questioningly at Tom the Turtler after Silent Sam had been dismissed from the cabin of the *Alert*.

"He speaks straight enough," he said. "Yet he seems to grudge the information. What think ye?"

"I think he has spoken the truth," answered Tom, "but that he regretted it the moment the words were out of his mouth. He should be watched lest he play a trick."

"I'll cap it with his life an he does," said Manning. "It seems a likely place. Dost know the region?"

"No. Save that much pearls and gold dust come from there."

"And where they are, pirates ply their trade."

The *Alert* was in the Gulf of Paria between the island of Trinidad and the mainland of Venezuela. They had entered through the Dragon's Mouth passage. Below the Serpent's Mouth, the southerly opening of the gulf, lay the continued delta of the Orinoco River, a wild mass of *llanos* and *mesas*, of lagoons and channels, dwarf oaks, *mimosa* and high grasses. In this maze lay Cypher Cay. Manning had made

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a map which the renegade quartermaster had confirmed.

The main stream forked like a trident with the outer lines curving in toward the points. Where the channels joined, the islet where the pirates had set up their fort lay in the center of a lagoon, blocking the entrance to the main stream. From that a narrow waterway led through the marshes and joined another of the many delta rivers farther south. It was an ideal hideout.

The right and left branches of the trident were too shallow for anything but rowboats, according to Silent Sam, but the center channel was deep enough for a vessel of fair draft. The vegetation, save for occasional clumps of trees, was not too high to debar the sea breeze filling the topsail and peak of the mainsail. Secure in their fort and the natural qualities of their hiding place the pirates were not wont to keep particular watch and an attack in the dusk of dawn should surprise them.

Manning, on account of the necessity of using his carronades against those of the fort, determined to sail the sloop into the lagoon. The pirates were wont to sleep ashore in the fort and a landing party, backed by the guns of the sloop, would storm the stockade while a boat's load scuttled the schooner.

Without a guide it would have been impossible to pick the right opening amid the marshy *llanos* that extended for more than a hundred miles in unvarying monotony. A light mist, pearled by the moonlight, made the choice more difficult but Silent Sam, standing close to the man at the wheel between Tom the Turtler and Manning, appeared to recognize certain landmarks without hesitation. Elizabeth Hastings had been given Manning's own cabin and the lieutenant had not awakened her for the final closing in.

After her first welcome to him she had retreated behind a barrier of pride, grief and exhaustion which he had not attempted to surmount. Sometimes he thought he saw a softening of her harassed spirit, a quality of kindliness in her eyes as she thanked him for some courtesy, but all her will seemed centered upon the avenging of her father's death and her own wrongs.

He could best serve her, he determined, by carrying out his mission. His own desire to wreak justice upon Cypher was little short of hers. Her presence on board with its little intimacies and the sheer magnetism of her presence, fostered his passion for her and with it the resolve to exact payment for every slight that had brought her sorrow through Cypher's appetites and ambitions.

As Sam had promised, the rising sun brought an on-shore breeze before which the *Alert* entered the bay into which the trident mouths debouched. The tide was swiftly flooding as they made the center channel, passing the barely discernible openings to right and left, making a good seven knots; the wind giving them steerage way.

They glided on between the densely vegetated banks, only their topsail showing above the higher foliage. Cranes and ibis, herons and storks, stalked here and there, stood like statues or flopped away on lazy wings, hardly disturbed as the sloop passed with a soft rush of water at her stem. Multitudes of ducks paddled off amid reeds and now and then an alligator slid off a bank or sunk effortless. The mist surrendered to the sun and the bell-birds began calling from the jungle.

The decks of the sloop were crowded with armed men. Muskets were stacked, cutlases and knives had been ground to razor-edging, roundshot and partridge were handy and the powder-boys stood ready. The sailors spoke in tense whispers and even those were checked as they came to the one turn in the channel that Sam stated led directly to the lagoon.

As the wheel went over three spokes and the men flattened the sails with sheet-ropes that ran through well-greased sheaves, Sam whirled swiftly, thrusting his elbow into the pit of Turtler Tom's stomach with such force as to leave him gasping. The pirate ran to the rail and leaped it as Manning fired. The shot struck Sam's shoulder and he fell clumsily into the water.

There was a rush to the side but the quartermaster had disappeared. It was but a short distance to the banks covered with rank vegetation that overhung the channel and a shaking of branches showed where he had come up unseen and scrambled ashore.

Manning stifled an involuntary and useless oath. His second in command came leaping aft.

"Played us a nice trick, sir," he exclaimed. "The channel is closed!"

A scant hundred yards ahead the water

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ended at a thick wall of green. Silent Sam had treacherously led them into a *cul-de-sac*. The breeze pressed in the topsail, the tide swept them on toward the barrier. The channel was far too narrow for the sloop to come about, to tow her stern-on against the flood was an impossible task.

"He has led us into the wrong channel," said Manning, furious at the success of the trick. Tom the Turtler, just recovering the wind that had been completely knocked out of his body, nodded as he gasped painfully.

"He will warn Cypher and they will attack by the other channels and through the jungle. They can sweep our decks without showing themselves.

Manning's nails cut into the flesh of his palms. He gave a series of crisp orders.

A stern anchor was dropped and a warp carried ashore from the bows and fastened ashore. Then the stern cable was slackened and the sloop allowed to swing with the tide until it lay across the channel, bowsprit and taffrail less than thirty feet from the banks. The attack by water was thus covered by the broadside of carronades while the long, swivel bow and stern chasers could rake the shore.

The lookout, who had been maintained on the spreader of the foremast since they had entered the passage, reported that he could see water gleaming through the verdure that blocked their way though the angle of sight was too acute for him to get any satisfactory view. He had seen a thin column of smoke rising, probably from behind the stockade on the island, itself hidden, as were the other channels, behind the thick and comparatively high growth. The wise, the only course, was to await developments. Instead of taking the offensive the king's men were now in the position of having to fight their way out.

Something crashed through the rank growth and a dozen muskets were leveled at the spot. A disheveled figure in torn shirt and knee-breeches, naked of legs and feet, covered with slime and bleeding from contact with thorns and knife-bladed *gamelote* grass, broke through to the bank, shouting:

"Don't shoot! I am a friend."

"It's Dickon!"

Elizabeth Hastings had come on deck, roused by the sounds of mooring and the shifting of gun-carriages. She stood by the side of Manning at the rail. Dickon saw her and called her name.

"Tell them not to shoot, Miss Hastings. I am coming aboard. Give me a line."

He plunged into the stream and struck out for the sloop. A rope was hurled to him and he caught it. As the sailors started to haul it in there came an unexpected resistance. Dickon's face twisted in agony and a shriek came from his lips as they disappeared below the surface. Then the rope came free with the poet still clinging to it. There was a swirl in the water behind him and long smears of blood floated away on the surface.

A cry of horror came from the girl's lips as the men lifted the poet across the rail. His right leg was severed above the knee and blood was pouring from veins and arteries.

"A *cayman*," he gasped as they laid him on the deck.

The doctor of the sloop, the assistant-surgeon of the frigate, applied a tourniquet but shook his head at Manning.

"Take him below," ordered the lieutenant, following the bearers with the surgeon and Elizabeth Hastings.

They laid him on the transom, his face already gray with the shadow of approaching death.

"Shock and loss of blood," murmured the doctor to Manning. "He can not last many minutes."

A glass of brandy brought back a flicker of color to the poet's cheeks. He turned to Elizabeth who sat beside him holding his hand.

"I—did—it—for you," he said. "Sam—warned them. They—will—come in boats and—by—land. You—can—sail—through—to—lagoon."

He fainted. The girl took his head in her lap and they gave him another draft of the strong liquor. His eyes opened and looked into her face bending above him as she stroked his sweat-dampened locks.

"It is only—a screen of boughs—across—the—channel."

Manning sprang up the companionway to the deck. A boat was lowered, then another. Sharp orders rang out. The sloop swung to the tide as the bow mooring was cast off.

Life ebbed swiftly through the bandages at Dickon's stump. The poet's face took on a waxen hue. His eyes fluttered, closed and opened again.

"Your—face," he said to the pitying girl. "It is—like—an—angel's. Perhaps——"

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She sensed what he would have said and, with a gush of sympathy that brought the first tears to her eyes that had gathered there for four years, swiftly bent and kissed him on the brows. A look of ineffable contentment transfigured the weak face, faded, but left its lingering imprint as his chest heaved to a final sigh and his eyes glazed. There was a change too in the eyes of Elizabeth Hastings, a softness that did not pass away.

THE seamen of the *Alert* tore away the twisted boughs of the screen in great masses that soon disclosed the free channel leading on to an open body of water. Manning glimpsed an islet surmounted with a palisade of stout timbers, smoke rising behind it. Moored nearby was the schooner of the pirates, *The Nameless*.

Tide and wind still held. The stern anchor was dragged in by a capstan overmanned with eager sailors. The carronades that had been shifted to the starboard broadside were replaced as the sloop gathered speed.

Boom! Boom! Two cannon roared from the fort as the *Alert* cleared the channel. One round shot ricocheted across the water, plunging through the mainsail in a skipping leap. The second slugged into the jungle, passing close astern.

"They've got the range down fine," said Manning. "They've got their main crowd in their boats. Head up for the schooner. We'll sink her if we can. Boarders away in both quarter boats! Mr. Ransome, take command and storm the fort.

A score of men, ten to a boat, swarmed to the boats and pulled swiftly for the isle. The sloop, answering with her carronades on the port side, dropped anchor within a hundred feet of the schooner and commenced firing on the vessel with her starboard battery. Bow and stern chasers were trained to cover the approach of the boats.

Splinters flew from the sides of the pirate schooner without response. The guns of the fort, depressed to bear upon the quarter boats, were elevated once more as the rowers neared the islet and shot began to drop close to the sloop.

"Fire for the water-line!" commanded Manning.

The iron hail tore through the sides of the schooner and soon she commenced to list while a cheer arose from the king's men. The aim from the palisade became more accurate. A shot carried away the bowsprit and another dismounted the bow-gun, shattering the carriage, just as the two boats landed under a scattering musketry fire and the sailors plied their axes on the log-gate.

Out from the main channel swept four boats crowded with pirates, furious at having the tables turned. The stern-gun of the sloop, loaded with partridge, spattered the water all about them as they came on, intent upon boarding. A shot from the fort smashed through the hull of the *Alert*. Bullets began to hum about the deck. Men dropped their oars in the leading boat as the partridge pellets reached their mark. The schooner was settling fast. On the island the gate of the palisade began to give way under the blows of the axmen.

The boats divided, two to each side and the fort guns ceased firing, fearful of killing their own men. The odds seemed evenly matched, though a furious fire poured through the breach in the gate.

Manning ranged his men along the rails with cutlas and boarding pikes. The freeboard of the sloop was low and they had not had time to raise their netting. On either bow and quarter the pirates swarmed and the combat resolved itself into a series of hand-to-hand combats.

Manning had distinguished Cypher in the leading boat and, as the pirate leader sprang to the rail, engaged him with his sword. A rush came aft as the king's men backed before the furious drive of the pirates who had stormed the bow and the two combatants were swept aside.

The buccaneers fought desperately with cutlas, pistol and dirk. For the moment their superiority in small arms gave them the advantage and the seamen began to fall before the rain of bullets. Rallying his men, Manning found his forces backing to the taffrail, hacking at the freebooters. Oaths arose, smoke filmed about the decks, blood trickled to the scuppers leaving slippery trails on which men went down fighting to the last.

Manning worked his way through the press of his own men to the gunner of the stern-chaser.

"Turn her in-deck," he shouted. "Load with partridge. I'll rush them and we'll split to give ye aim!" The man nodded and dropped dead from a random bullet. Tom

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the Turtler sprang forward and tore from the man's hand the linstock that held the glowing match, roaring his orders to the rest of the gun-crew.

"Drive 'em, Skipper," he yelled. "For-'ard with 'em and give me a clear aim."

The king's men rallied to Manning. The pistols of the pirates were emptied. There was no time to reload in the ramp of the combat. It was steel-to-steel and the sturdy seamen slowly forced back the swearing mass of buccaneers, Manning striving to reach Cypher, whose sword flashed as he retreated before the rush.

The mainsail had been hastily furled in gaskets and the boom laid in its crutch but the latter had been swept aside in the fight and the boom had swung to port, forcing the combat to narrow to the space between the mast and the starboard rail. A knot of the king's men had been cut off in the bows and, fighting valiantly, cut down or pistoled. The pirates now outnumbered Manning's men, unless those who were storming the fort returned in time to stem the tide.

Cypher was engaged with two seamen when Manning ordered them aside and lunged at the pirate leader with his service sword. Cypher laughed as he engaged. Unscratched, fully believing he led a charmed life, he fought with cool confidence. The lieutenant had been slightly slashed in the left forearm with knife or cutlas—in the heat of the fight he did not know which—and one epaulet had been carried away by a bullet that had scored his shoulder.

His service sword was shorter than Cypher's, the pirate's skill at fence was superior to his but the circumstances prohibited any nice display at *tierce* and *carte*. Both were hampered by their own men and there was room only for lunge, parry and answering thrust. Manning was the more compact and muscular. His blade grated against his opponent's with a force that made Cypher careful to fence closely and the lieutenant's eyes blazed with something more than the ordinary battle-light.

The *pattera* of musketry came from the fort, but, on the sloop, the sounds of combat were confined to the rasp of steel, the hard breathing and occasional shouts of the fighters, a thud and a groan as a man went down. The pirate schooner lay submerged in four fathoms, her masts showing listed to port.

Manning's men began to lose ground, faillng back sternward once more. A sailor, spitted by a dagger, fell sprawling between the two swordsmen and the man who had stabbed him turned to strike at the lieutenant. It was Silent Sam, fighting one-handed with a long stiletto, striving to regain his lost prestige, partly restored already by his news of the sloop's arrival.

Manning's sword flashed and sheathed itself in the quartermaster's body, entering beneath the armpit, and Sam slumped. There was no time to lose in the uncertain issue between himself and Cypher, much as he desired to be the personal instrument of vengeance. He countered a vicious lunge delivered across Sam's body and leaped aside to the rail shouting the order to his men to stand back.

A lane opened. At the end of it showed the muzzle of the stern-chaser turned in-deck, Turtler-Tom holding the match close to the touch-hole. The pirates shrank but Cypher rallied them.

"Rush them overboard," he cried. "Follow me. No living man can——."

He drew his last pistol from his belt and fired at Tom, the crack of the weapon cutting off his speech. The bullet flew true. Shot through the head, Tom collapsed. But, even as he fell dead and the linstock dropped from his nerveless hand, the glowing match touched the priming and the Long-Tom roared, spraying its lead in the mass of the buccaneers.

At their head, his trunk sieve-riddled by the partridge at close range, Cypher, a look of amaze erasing his triumphant sneer, slumped in a pool of his own blood, killed, as the voodoo witch had foretold, by no living man or woman, shot almost to pieces by the posthumous act of Tom the Turtler.

The deck was a shambles. More than half the remaining pirates lay writhing in agony, dead and dying fenced together in a twisted heap. A mighty roar came from the fort. The sloop shuddered at the impact. The magazine in the fort had been blown up. The cheers of the king's men filled the vacuum that followed the report. The islet was taken. The fight was over.

The Sea shall be his only bride
And Death shall be the priest.
And he the crested waves shall ride
And quaff their creaming yeast.
His lips shall know the storm's caress,
His beard be wet with brine.
The voodoo riddle, hard to guess,
Shall Cypher then divine.

BUCCANEER BALLADES.

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"I SHALL seek my aunt, of course," said Elizabeth Hastings. "You tell me she is safe. But I hardly know what we shall do. The plantation is destroyed."

"You have friends, or relations, in England?" asked Manning.

"My stay in England was not overhappy," she answered. "My relations are distant ones. I made no friends, thanks to the gossips of Bridgetown and their correspondents."

Her eyes that had seemed to Manning to have lost something of their moodiness since the death of Dickon and that of Cypher, hardened again.

"I have heard all that story," he said. "I wrote to my mother, Miss Hastings. The letter is on its way. She would be very glad to receive you, and your aunt."

"My aunt will doubtless wish to live with her married sister in Carolina. It is kind of you to suggest my visiting your mother. She might not be as glad to receive me as you imagine. You are a man. You look at things differently. Besides—I do not know her. If she has heard of me my name has been coupled with scandal—it will still be so."

"No scandal can attach to any one under the protection and friendship of Lady Manning, of Manning Court," said the lieutenant proudly. "My mother married a commoner—for love. I am her only son. She has long wanted me to provide her with a daughter."

The girl's pale face flushed rosy as she gazed at him half incredulously.

"You mean?" she whispered.

"You told me to come to you after Drayton had been killed and ask you for anything. Instead I ask you for everything—for yourself."

She looked at him searchingly. Her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Almost you tempt me," she said. "I have been so very lonely. It is not pity, not chivalry? You believe that I am——"

She read his answer in his eyes and, little by little, she crept into his arms.

Four days later the *Alert* headed up at sunset for the harborage of Bridgetown. The western sky was crimson and the wave-crests reflected the sanguine hue. At the end of the repaired bowsprit tossed the strangest figurehead that had ever entered the roadstead. Nailed to the boom, a false flush on the sunken cheeks encrusted with salt, the brows a black line above the dark pits caverning the shrunken eyeballs, the head of Drayton, known to the Brethren of the Coast as Captain Cypher, rode the waves, the spindrift kisses of "his only bride, the Sea," moist on his blackened, grinning lips.

"Godde helpe alle good adventurers
Who love strange roades sae welle
Whose prysonne ys a citye
Whose countynge-house a celle.
Sende them a safe deliveraunce
That each may lyte his fyre
Wythe only starres for gaolers
Inne the lande of hys desyre."

RUSSELL MOTT.

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A MATTER OF ALTRUISM

by WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY

Author of "The World Next Door," "A Case at Law," etc.

THE dictionary defines the word "altruism" something like this: "Altruism—the principles inculcated by Auguste Comte, French Philosopher, 1798-1857. Involving the sacrifice of self in the interests of others: opposed to egoism."

Osgood, adult representative of the Boy Scout movement in Vermont, realized the meaning of the word perfectly, although he might not have used precisely these words in definition. But Osgood's problem as he stood on the steps of the new post-office building in Bennington and looked down into the grimy, wistful, appealing face of the ten-year-old boy, was to avoid academic terms and define altruism in syllables which the lad could understand.

"No, sonny," said he, "You're too small a boy yet a while. Two years more and you'll be eligible to join. You see, if a real war should come, the Boy Scouts must be old enough to go with the soldiers and take care of themselves while doing the work that they may be assigned. But that doesn't mean, sonny, that you're too young to appreciate the things that the Boy Scouts stand for.

"We train boys to be ready at all times to sacrifice themselves and their ability for the public good. That means that a boy must stop being selfish and think only of the good which he can be to society and the things which he can do for the comfort, safety and pleasure of others, regardless of what it costs him personally to do them."

The urchin's gaze wandered from Osgood's face, down the street, down to the ground, to the hairy-face scrub dog who sat thumping his stub tail on the steps as he waited his cue from the lad as to what would be the next episode in canine experience into which his small and grimy-faced owner should plunge them.

Finally the boy's perplexed glance returned to Osgood's face. The man realized that the lad was trying hard to sense what the middle-aged man was telling him. Osgood wished he was stronger on words of one syllable so that he might convey his meaning more effectively.

But trust a ten-year-old freckled-faced kid to understand what a grown man tells him. Osgood had mistaken the perplexed expression. The boy understood him well enough—or sufficiently to grasp that same altruistic principle which the man was attempting to instil. The message on the freckled face was not misunderstanding.

It was inability for the moment to assimilate the disappointment. After waiting for many weeks for the State scout-master to visit Bennington so he could petition him in person for affiliation with the local organization, even the State leader—despite his fame for kindness and leniency—was unable to grant the request which the local officer had denied.

"I gotter dog," he said. "Other day in school, teacher was readin' how over in France they used dogs in the trenches to carry messages and orders back and forth

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or carry medicine to the wounded. I thought maybe if the soldiers was goin' to war, that the Government might use Lightnin' that way.

"He ain't pretty to look at, Lightnin' ain't. But he's got brains, that dog has. And seein' I'm the only one he'll do things for, I thought maybe if the Government could use him, that I might go along to train him and that would get me by."

Lightning—hairy-faced, cross-bred combination of Irish terrier and just plain dog—thumped his tail harder than ever at this suggestion and looked expectantly from one face to the other.

OSGOOD'S first impulse was to laugh. The idea of the United States War Department having a martial use for Lightning was uproariously funny. But when the man transferred his attention from dog to boy, all the humor went out of the situation and in its place a sudden flood of emotion clutched at the scout-master's throat.

"Sonny," said Osgood thickly, "you've got the right idea. But I doubt if the Government just yet has any imperative need for dogs such as Lightning. There's no getting around it that he's a great dog. But we haven't got to the point yet where the country's going to get into trench warfare and probably we won't for the next two years. By that time you'll be old enough.

"For the present you just prepare for your admission to the Scouts, by watching out for chances to be of service to your mother, your neighbors and your town. Don't count any sacrifice too big to make for them or for the public good, for that's the first requisite of a soldier.

"War, horrible though it is, is the greatest institution under the sun for bringing out loyalty and absolute self-sacrifice, even of life itself, for other folks. But you don't need the battle-field or even a membership card in the Boy Scouts to show it in your case, sonny. You can practise the same spirit of loyalty, self-sacrifice and patriotism right in your own family and your own neighborhood. You can become so expert, it will be second-nature to be loyal to your country and have the real soldier spirit—even in times of peace—when you grow up."

"And I—I can't be a Boy Scout—even if I have got a dog to help the Army?" faltered the boy.

"Not yet," returned the officer kindly.

The boy's lip puckered and he closed his mouth tightly. Seeing the pathos in his distress—the officer hastened to add—

"But sonny, listen! Don't you know that no soldier is permitted to go out and fight the enemy, until he has spent from one to two years in drilling and training?"

"Yes sir," replied the boy.

"Well then, why should you feel bad when I tell you that you must put in two years—from now until the time you're twelve years old—in training and drilling yourself for admission to the Scouts?"

"I ain't—I ain't got nobody to train me," lamented the boy.

An idea thrust itself forward for the scout-master's reply:

"I know, sonny, but there's Lightning to be taken into consideration. If the Government wants to use him, he's got to be trained. It'll take you all of two years to teach him to do the work that the police dogs are doing over in the French trenches. So, don't you see how important it is, all things considered, that you think twice before applying for a place in the Scouts right away now?"

The boy brightened somewhat at this.

"You mean you want me to start trainin' Lightnin' right away for carrying messages in the trenches?"

"I mean," said the scout-master solemnly, "that I want you to start right away being a little man, and a model soldier. I want you to train yourself to obey orders quickly, silently, and perfectly, so long as they come from some one in authority over you. I want you to watch out for influences in your neighborhood which are bothering people and do your best as a good citizen in so far as you can to correct them.

"I want you to spend the next two years in hard training of yourself for Scout work, regardless of whether you have any one to train you or not. And when you are finally admitted to the Scouts—well, you'll show yourself far and above other boys who haven't had these instructions given them from the State-master and perfected themselves beforehand."

The boy looked down at the yellow dog. The man saw it was hard for the boy to acquiesce. He could not spend much more time talking. He therefore used a last expedient.

"What's your name, sonny?" he demanded.

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"Timothy Wimbleton Smith, sir," the lad replied.

"Well, Timothy Wimbleton Smith, the first law of the Scouts is implicit obedience to your superior officer. If you want to join the Scouts you must demonstrate your ability to obey orders. Now then, as your future commanding officer, I direct you to go home and do the things I have enumerated. Also, I direct you to train your dog, Lightning Smith for the use of the United States War Department at Washington, commencing at once. Salute!"

The boy saluted.

"Aye, aye, sir!" he said weakly.

Out of sight, Osgood swallowed hard, drew a long breath and declared to no one in particular.

"And some one says that the boys of this generation are mollycoddles."

II

OSGOOD never expected to hear of the freckled-faced urchin and his dog Lightning again.

But when he presented himself at the home of his host in Old Bennington half an hour later, Osgood could not keep from comparing the altruism of the boy with the sordidness and egoism of old Ben Wheeler, the celebrated munitions-maker, who paced the broad veranda of his palatial residence with the attitude of one soured on all the world.

"So you're still mixed up with that organization of deluded puppets that imagine they want to be soldiers, are you?" he demanded of Osgood. "When your father and I were in business together, I always thought he was a man whose son would show more sense."

"Don't mind father," declared Mrs. Wheeler of the forty-four inch bust, coming up at the moment to greet him. "Those inspectors of the Russian Government have just condemned fifty thousand rifles that father's been making and instead of taking it out on the Czar, he's taking it out on us."

"Inspectors!" hooted old Benjamin. "You mean 'grafters!' They know that so long as they can get away with this condemnation business, just so long will the Russian Government keep spending money until the supposedly perfect rifle is evolved. There isn't a thing the matter with those rifles. They'll kill a German just as quickly with a slideshell-ejector as they will with a vertical spring action. Rot!

"Here we've been making guns for two and a half years now, and yet we haven't shipped a single weapon. All because some bunch of grafters in the Russian War Department are pulling down a private percentage on the appropriations for munitions that's spent in this country."

"What's becoming of the guns you've been accummulating during the past thirty months?" asked Osgood, sitting down in one of the lavish wicker veranda chairs and mopping his forehead.

"Oh, we're piling 'em up in our various storehouses," growled old Ben.

"Who pays for them?"

"Russia of course. Sooner or later there'll be a shakedown in the Russian War Cabinet and to save its soul alive, the graft will be omitted and they'll be ordered forward. But all this crooked business just makes me sick! And it makes me sicker to look at you in that uniform and know that Jud Osgood's boy is engaged in the business of boosting such rottenness in the rising generation in this country."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothin's on the level any more—in this country any more than in the governments of Europe. You train those poor deluded little puppets—as I called 'em a moment before—into thinking that war and government and patriotism is good and noble and grand and they ought to grow up and obey orders.

"Instead of teachin' 'em that the next man is no better than themselves and will bear twice as much watching, you harp on blind obedience being the thing and as a result, a European War happens along."

"Judas Priest!" gasped Osgood. "You haven't suddenly turned pacifist and idealist, have you?"

Old Ben laughed coarsely.

"Not much!" he retorted. "But being in this line of business so long has given me a good long look behind the scenes. It's knocked all the idealism I ever had, clean out of me. This constant shouting about patriotism gives me a stomach-ache—when I know how it's generated and why. That's why I censor you for increasing the deluded little puppets."

"That's queer talk," declared Osgood, "for one who's making the money you are, out of war munitions."

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"Oh rot!" declared old Ben. "If I didn't make it out of war stuff, I'd make it out of something else. I don't give a hoot how I make it, so long as I make it!"

"Do you think it fair?" Osgood asked, "to censure everything that makes for patriotism and national altruism just because there is a certain amount of graft in the Russian War Office? Suppose every one was as wise as you claim to be—and held the views you claim to hold. What kind of a nation and a government would we have anyway—indeed, if we had one at all?"

"There's no danger," retorted old Ben, "so long as there's fellows like you to encourage all the soldier-business from the cradle up. But it does get me sore to make and complete half a million rifles and throw them all away—practically and for the time being—because a lot of graft exists. It goes against all my Americanism."

"Americanism!" cried Osgood. "What word is that for you to use who have just given expression to such sentiments as: 'You don't care how you make money so long as you make it!'"

"I mean in a business way!" corrected old Ben. "When I get a big bunch of men together in a factory and make a product—put over a huge organization and accomplish a great industrial undertaking—I like to see positive results from my work. I don't want to have the whole business condemned on any mechanical technicality."

"It's funny," said Osgood, "that men like you shouldn't be able to realize that the same human trait of loyalty which makes for your factory organization is the same human trait of loyalty which makes for our national organization—which is the same terrible thing called 'Government.'

"'Americanism' is correct, Mr. Wheeler. Only you haven't caught its true import. You're bragging about the 'Americanism' in creating your own organization and annuling the Americanism that has created the still greater national organization of this Government which has given you protection so you could be free to work out your great industrial plans. Only one is your own private institution for your own private gain where the other is a great public institution for a great public gain. Yet the spirit of Americanism is identical."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, stop philosophizing!" roared old Ben. "All society is one great big mixed-up mess and I've got done years ago trying to attempt unsnarling it."

"And yet some one's got to unsnarl it and keep it straight, Mr. Wheeler, and that's what I'm trying to do with my boys. I'm not trying to dupe them into becoming deluded little puppets for cannon-fodder. I'm simply trying to instil enough altruism into them to give them the clear courage and healthy willingness to apply themselves unselfishly to the problems of keeping this 'mess' of our Government as little of a 'mess' as possible. You criticize and condemn while at the same time you leave it a 'mess.'"

"Cut out the philosophy and moralizing, I say!" cried old Ben.

"You say that because you can't answer my argument," replied Osgood.

"I don't want to answer it," Wheeler retorted. "I've decided from what I've seen that humanity is headed plumb for hell and you or I or no other men can stop it. I'm simply making the most of things and letting a bad business alone."

Osgood opened his lips to reply. But at the moment the vision of a grimy, freckled-faced boy came before him, offering the dearest possession of his heart to his country—a plain yellow dog infested with fleas. After all, men like Wheeler were the exceptions in society. At heart the country was like the heart of the boy. What was the use of making it an argument?

III

WHEN the Summer season ended, most of the residents of Old Bennington closed their places and returned to New York or the South. The Wheeler mansion, however, remained open. Old Ben used the place as a refuge when the cares of his business grew too oppressive.

He was in his study in the northeast corner of his big house when the morning papers were brought him announcing the severance of diplomatic relations with Germany. Osgood was there, also, spending another week-end.

Old Ben had hardly finished the newspapers—of which he was a religious reader—before the eleven o'clock train came up the valley, bringing Hardimann, his manager and confidential man, on a flying trip from the New York office.

Hardimann, a silent, efficient, unemotional man who resembled King George of

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England in appearance—faced his employer a half hour later and handed him an impressive document for perusal.

"What is this?" demanded the perplexed magnate, scowling as much at the annoying barking of a dog outside as at the import of the document.

"It is an order from the War Department commandeering our big Hopedale Steel Plant and all our available manufactured goods for the use of the United States Government," declared the manager. "That is why I am here."

"Well, of all the unmitigated gall, this order from that bunch of amateur statesmen down at Washington takes the cake!" exploded Wheeler. "Commandeered our plant, eh? I'll see 'em in hell first!"

"You don't understand," said Hardimann. "This isn't a request. We haven't anything to say in the matter."

"Haven't we? We'll see! Why, if we must turn over our plant to the Government, it means we don't make a penny there for ourselves!"

"But this is a public measure."

Old Ben glanced quickly at his manager.

"Are you one of them softies, too?" he demanded.

"What do you mean? In time of national stress the Government is paramount."

"Oh I know all about that argument. I haven't been a business man thirty-seven years without knowing all about how much right the Government has or hasn't got in these precious 'times of national stress'—times of national stress of their own making. But if you think I'm going to submit, you got another think coming. There are ways around such a situation."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we'll use a little of our 'pull' to have this order rescinded."

OLD BEN impatiently jabbed a call-bell. A servant appeared.

"For Heaven's sake, Jenkins, go and shoot that —— dog that's making all the racket outside. I can't hear myself think. He's been yapping and howling out there all of the morning."

"I will see that he is removed at once, sir. Yes, sir!" responded the velvet-footed and soft-voiced servant.

He withdrew.

The munitions-maker returned to a consideration of the international predicament, with his manager. The dog outside continued to whine and howl. In a few minutes the servant was again summoned.

"Well, why haven't you stopped it?" old Ben demanded.

"For the reason, sir, that we really have no jurisdiction in the matter. The dog belongs to the small boy who lives in the little white house across the street, sir. The boy is at school and the dog had to be tied up so's he won't run away, sir."

"Then cut his rope! Buy the —— cur! Do something about it, but shut him up."

The servant withdrew. He reentered the big library later with an apologetic air.

"I'm sorry, sir," said he, "but couldn't you put up with it until the small boy gets home from school, sir? The father says that if I touch the rope, he'll fill my legs full of buckshot. He was very uncivil, sir.

"He declared that the fact of his not havin' as much money as yourself, sir, didn't prohibit him from keeping a dog just because you could hear him barking now and then. He says it won't hurt you any to be annoyed a little bit by a yellow dog, and claims it isn't half the inconvenience that he was caused when you diverted his spring last Summer and hurt his house water supply."

"But what right have people to keep animals that are a nuisance to the neighbors—whether they're princes or paupers?" demanded the exasperated man. "Did you offer to buy the dog?"

"I did, sir. The father says if the small boy that owns him wants to sell him when he comes home from school, that's his affair and we must make a trade with the small boy."

"I haven't heard a —— thing all morning but that abominal cur's yapping. Go get one of the cars, drive to the school and get the little pest out of his class. Bring him here. I'll stop that dog nuisance or I'll wring the little brat's neck."

"Very good, sir!"

Fifteen minutes elapsed. Old Benjamin Wheeler strode up and down the room debating what steps he should take and what wires he would pull to ward off the Government's seizure of his magnificent munitions plant at Hopedale, and during this time the dog's yapping continued. The servant finally entered with a frightened youngster in tow.

"Do you own that dog that keeps folks'

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nerves on edge in this neighborhood night and day?" he roared at the boy.

"If you mean my dog Lightnin'—yes, sir!" the boy replied. "But—L-L-L-Lightnin' don't mean no harm to any one," the ten-year-old added weakly. "He just gets sick o' bein' tied up all day when I'm at school. But if I don't tie him up, he comes right over to the school-house and busts in—to be with me. He—he jumped right through the window one day when he seen me. He broke all the glass and my father had to pay for it."

"Well, I'm tired of hearing his yowling. I want him suppressed. I don't suppose anything will make you part with him but money. How much will you take for him?"

"I couldn't—I couldn't sell Lightnin'," whispered the boy in alarm. "One of us would just about die, I guess."

"Come, come! Cut out the sob-stuff! How much for the dog?"

"Was you—was you goin' to let him live here with you where I could see him once in a while, maybe?"

"What! Have that mangy pup transferred over here? Not on your young life! I want to put a bullet through him—legally!"

"You—you want to—to—*kill Lightnin'*?"

THE boy's little face went white. His knees grew weak. His voice trembled and terrible tears welled in his horrified eyes.

"Have I got to be bothered with a sentimental brat at such a time as this?" stormed old Ben. "All over a low-down hound that's disturbin' the whole neighborhood day and night! Come, my time is valuable! Name a price for this invaluable possession of yours; how about ten dollars?"

"I—I wouldn't take twelve!" choked the boy. "You ain't got no idea what a brainy dog Lightnin' is! And I'm trainin' him for the United States Government! He's goin' to carry messages for the soldiers in the trenches, Lightnin' is, same as them dogs over in France. I been workin' over him all Summer ever since Mr. Osgood commanded me to—so's to have him ready when war came."

Old Ben was taken aback for a moment.

"What's the difference between having him shot by soldiers of the enemy or shot by one of my men?" he demanded. "The dog dies in either case, don't he?"

"Yes, sir! But he'd be doin' his duty then, tryin' to help his country."

"What's the difference between his duty to his country then and his duty to the neighbors now? Osgood's been stuffing you about the Government wanting dogs for use in war. And if they did, they wouldn't be takin' low-down mongrels such as would tag around after a small boy like you.

"If you want that dog to do something valuable for society, you can accomplish more by taking him out to the Walloomsac River bridge; tying a fifty-pound stone to his neck and shoving him overboard; than you can by saving him on any fool hope that the Government wants him. Do you get that, bub? Now do your duty to society and the neighbors by taking ten dollars from me to soothe your feelings and then putting your cur on the greased chute for the dog heaven."

The little boy turned away from the three men. He leaned his forearm against the door casing and putting his face in it, began to cry softly.

The materialist pulled a roll of bills from his pocket, slipped off one and handed it to the servant with an ugly nod.

"Try to negotiate this jelly-bean dog deal," he said. "The young brat probably won't give up the pup for love nor money. But I'm sick of being pestered by the animal. And if you can't do it any other way, get behind our stone wall with a rifle and see if you can't pick the cur off. I'll cheerfully pay the damages."

Hardimann had been watching the scene with keen interest.

"What's the use of being so clumsy about a plain dog deal as all this?" he asked.

"Well, what suggestion have you got to offer?" old Ben snarled.

"Can't you see that all you've got to do is to appeal to the kid's sense of abnormal altruism? He'll make away with his own dog if you go at him right.

"Convince him that it's better for this pup to snuff out now in the interests of neighborhood peace, than it is in the trenches in the event of war and you can wash your hands of the whole trivial business. He'll do it for you without any fuss or lawsuits."

"That's a good idea," old Ben declared. He turned to the servant.

"See what you can do," he ordered. "You can keep the ten dollars if you do it."

"Very good, sir," returned the servant.

When he had taken the little boy from the

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room, both old Ben and his manager laughed coarsely.

They laughed to apologize for the stab of their own consciences.

IV

OSGOOD had not been in the room during this scene between magnate and little boy.

Late in the afternoon, old Benjamin according to his custom, started on his daily constitutional through historic Old Bennington village. Osgood joined the man in his walk. For twenty minutes as they walked over the hill past the hoary old battle monument, down the long lane past the Mount Anthony country club, toward the swift Walloomsac River, the scout-master listened to a tirade against the Government composed of "those pin-headed amateur statesmen at Washington who've embroiled us in the European mess."

Through it all, Osgood preserved a discreet silence. Warmer and more abusive grew old Benjamin. Osgood had difficulty in accounting for this unusual outburst. He studied the old materialist keenly.

Then slowly into the younger man's sense of proportion grew the intuitive realization that old Benjamin had something more worrying him than his business.

He was damning the Government to quiet his nerves over something else which had happened. Osgood waited. He felt that the elder man's action would be explained voluntarily before their walk was finished.

"Mr. Wheeler," he finally said, "something else is troubling you besides the international situation, isn't it?"

The munitions-maker kicked several stones from his pathway viciously.

"What makes you think so?" he snarled.

"Your over-doing this abuse. Twice within the past five minutes you've unconsciously stated that 'if those cheap skates of Congressmen had as much civic pride as that little brat and his dog, there wouldn't need to be any such set of circumstances as we find ourselves in.' What boy and his dog is on your mind, Mr. Wheeler?"

"None of your confounded business!" snapped old Ben. "Besides, I didn't say any such thing."

Osgood did not made it an argument. He smiled grimly at the other's confusion. But he saw that for the first time in years the grizzled old manufacturer was troubled. He was not surprised when the contrary old chap suddenly cried aloud miserably—

"Great Hector!—if only I could have the faith in my fellow man that I'd like to have! If I could only go back; become a little kid again and have a little kid's healthy views of all that's supposedly noble and grand and great in the world! Oh, man, man! If I only could!"

They were approaching the historic old Walloomsac as old Ben uttered these strange words—strange at least for old Benjamin. Some distance ahead, Osgood saw two figures. One was a little boy. The other was a scrubby yellow dog led unwillingly by a bit of rope.

As the strange pair ahead approached nearer the stream, the boy stopped, looked down at the dog, dropped impulsively beside him and crushed the shaggy little body to his embrace.

It was plain that the canine could not account for these unusual manifestations of affection. Yet there is such a thing as mental telepathy between a boy and his dog. This was demonstrated as the pair finally came up to the bridge.

The pup at last sensed—through some reasoning explainable only as dog psychology—that he was being led to a place where an experience awaited him such as he had never before known. Something was in progress which plainly was not to end in anything beneficial to him.

OLD BEN'S attention was finally drawn to the two ahead. The grizzled old man swallowed hard and stared grimly fascinated. He put out a knobby old hand to stop Osgood from going nearer.

As any innocent dog would resent such proceedings as much as any innocent human, the pup tried to escape from this obvious tragic affection. But the little boy's grimy hand clutched the clothesline fast. Tug and whimper as he might, the one whom he thought was his best friend on earth was irrevocably and adamantinely bent on his personal dog extinction.

Reaching the iron trusses of the bridge above the swift stream swollen by the melting snows, the boy tied the dog securely and went hunting the neighborhood for ballast in the ghastly tragedy.

There was no stone in the vicinity of

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sufficient size to sink the dog, which would yield to the boy's frail strength. But over by an old fence was a log of wood, the size and weight of an ordinary railroad tie. This the boy could raise and it responded to his disconsolate, half-hearted exertions.

He dragged it from the gutter up to the road, then on to the floor of the bridge. He poised it on the edge above the steel-blue surging water. Then he untied the worthless pup with fumbling fingers.

The dog's *ki-yi* rent the neighborhood and he fought desperately when the lad drew the rope securely about the big chunk of fallen tree and made it fast.

When he saw his struggles were futile, with the wisdom of countless ages of dogs he buried his whole little scrub body in the boy's arms and with his cold muzzle thrust into the other's neck, he remained silent—pleading for life with all the eloquence of dumb animal silence.

"I just gotta do it, Lightnin'," the little boy sobbed. "Mr. Osgood says soldiers is them that makes sacrifices in times o' peace as well as in war. You been botherin' the neighbors, Lightnin', and I guess it's up to us to sacrifice each other like real soldiers and like Mr. Osgood told us we got to do if we want to train to be regular Scouts."

The little boy clutched the dog in a last agonizing embrace.

"Go'-by, Lightnin'," choked the boy. "It ain't half so painful as being shot in the trenches, anyhow. You can remember that I wouldn't take their old ten dollars. I'm doin' it because Mr. Osgood said I gotta think of others first if I wanner be a Scout, and he's my sooperior ossifer. Go'-by, Lightnin' and remember it's just the same as if you died for the Government."

With a sudden push—he could not bear to drag out the torture by doing it slowly—the little boy released the companion of many happy boy hours and shoved the log over the edge of the bridge. The dog made a frantic clutch to keep his footing but his stubby little paws slipped.

Before the astounded scout-master could reach the bridge, the pitiful little chunk of dog flesh had been pulled over the edge by the weight of the log and with scarcely a splash had disappeared from sight.

The little boy had paid the supreme price for his altruism, uttered a wail and started back up the road. But when the tragedy of what he had done broke upon him—when he realized that he was never, never, never going to see Lightning again—his strength left him and he fell on the hard frozen ground.

There the scout-master—who understood the situation and boys intuitively—found him. He picked up the sobbing little body in his strong arms and bore it up the hill. On the way the boy blubbered out the story of what he had done and why.

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THE scout-master on his visit of the previous Summer had discovered that the boy lived in the little white house across from the Wheeler place. Thither he bore him rapidly now, disregarding the old munitions-maker and leaving him far behind in the Winter's dusk.

Osgood entered the little white house and nearly gave a good woman heart failure at the sight of the pitiful burden he carried. He laid the lad down on the sofa.

"He has a bit of fever, I think," he told the frantic mother. "He—he's just gone and drowned his dog because he was told it was the right thing to do to show the proper altruistic spirit. Poor little kid!"

Osgood withdrew, leaving the humble household in confusion.

He walked out into the deepening Winter's dusk—a very melancholy dusk—a dusk somewhat like his country was entering because of the men who were like the one whose palatial residence loomed against the Western afterglow, over the way. He stood, striving for poise, beneath the roof of the unpretentious front porch. And in those few seconds he pieced out the tiny tragedy.

After a while he got in motion and he walked. But it was not toward the big house over the way. It was back over the way he had brought the boy—back down where he had left the miserable, materialistic old man, who was responsible.

But there was no old man back down the long road toward the bridge. Though he had left him but a few moments before, old Benjamin had disappeared.

If Osgood had stopped to ask himself the why of this disappearance, he would indeed have been puzzled. The munitions-maker could not have had time to follow him and turn in at his own gate over the way. He had hardly time to turn eastward and walk out of sight toward

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the main town of New Bennington.

In his heart Osgood did not care what became of the detested old materialist—unless it was a secret wish that all men of his type might be led to the brink of those angry swirling waters by a rope, like the pitiful little dog, and be pitched headlong into the torrent as fitting demonstration of the use which America had for their type in this hour of national distress.

The scout-master walked and walked and walked. The afterglow died. A blanket of murky darkness muffled down over all the world. From old Bald Mountain on the east to hoary old Anthony on the west, the country was a stretch of dreariness.

Osgood did not want to return to the mansion. He dreaded what he might say to old Benjamin if, in his present mood, he encountered him. A family friendship which covered many years, would be severed. All over a worthless little yellow dog!

But was it "all over a worthless little yellow dog?"

Deep in his heart Osgood recognized that it was more than that. He knew that the whole episode was allegorical of something vast and epochal—the spirit of the age which the country was entering. In the little boy and his sacrifice Osgood recognized the antitype of the plain people, opposed to selfishness, egoism and materialism represented by old Benjamin.

Yes, as he had told himself before, the heart of the country was like the heart of the boy. There was the willingness to sacrifice for ideals, ability to endure the awful price for no payment but an expression of the highest, noblest, purest altruism. But—how far was the little boy's sacrifice in vain? How far would that other greater sacrifice which the little boy typified, be in vain. Osgood wondered and was troubled and bitter in his soul.

IT WAS very late when he finally turned his steps toward the mansion on the hill. He passed under the shadow of the great redstone monument which commemorated the first travail pain at his country's birth, and alongside the cemetery where Hessian soldiers were sleeping side by side with the first Revolutionary leaders. He knocked on the side door of the humble white house.

His incessant knocking was not answered. Osgood was alarmed. He admitted himself. But the man he met when he sought the boy's room above, was not Timothy Wimbleton Smith's father or his mother or either of his older brothers.

It was old Benjamin Wheeler.

There was a strange look on old Benjamin's hard face. When Osgood would have spoken, the old man raised a hand as though warding off a blow.

"Well?" demanded the scout-master.

Old Ben whetted his lips, cleared his throat. Then he cracked the semblance of a smile. From the plain kitchen-table covered with spotless white oil-cloth, old Ben lifted a broken dog's collar to which a bit of clothesline was yet tied. The rope had a frayed end.

"Only a boy would have imagined that a log of wood would take the place of a stone in sinking a dog," said the old man hoarsely. "It floated. Of course it floated."

"And you—you—?"

"Yes," confessed the old man, "I did."

Osgood searched the other's face. The hard-hearted magnate dropped his eyes before that searching gaze.

"Don't it say somewhere in literature, Osgood, about 'and a little kid shall lead them?'"

"Yes," said the scout-master, "it does say that somewhere in—literature. But does that look on your face mean——?"

"Yes," croaked old Benjamin.

A feeling of something grand and noble and glorious swayed Osgood for a moment. The allegory was complete in that moment. The faith of plain folks in their ideals as typified in the little boy would be too much for the faith of "those others" to stand in the day that was coming, even as it had been too much for old Benjamin to withstand that day which was now closing. So it would ever be until the end of all things. It is the law of right, which is the law of God.

Osgood went upstairs. A father and a mother and a kindly old doctor were watching by the bedside of a little boy whose breathing was finally coming easier.

Snuggled beside the sleeping boy was the body of a scrubby yellow dog. His hairy muzzle was thrust down flat on his paws. His dark soulful eyes watched every one keenly in the room, for he knew he was only permitted on the bed owing to the exigency of the circumstances and during flawless behavior.

And the bed was rapidly filling with fleas.

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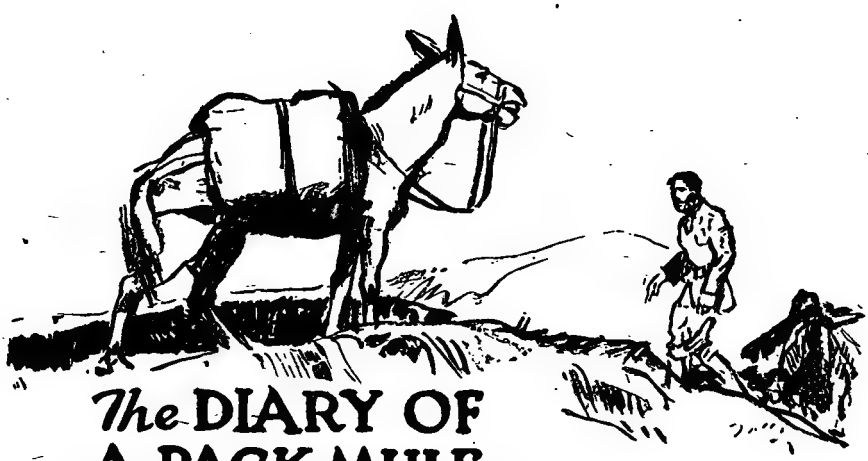

The DIARY OF A PACK-MULE

by BUCK CONNOR

DAYS of the Brown Grass:

"I've traveled fur and I've traveled long, and I've saw a heap since the last time the grass got brown. And I'm sayin' to myself right now:

"Gabe, you ole lop-eared brown son-of-a-gun, it's time you're keepin' tabs on yourself, er you'll be plumb forgittin' who you are an' where you come from."

Mules is proud, same as hosses and other folks, an' ole Gabe shore don't want to forgit he's a Pursely mule, and foaled on ole John Pursely's farm.

It mighty nigh broke my fool heart when they broke up and sold me off the place. But doggone it, seems like a feller just gits good and satisfied with hisself, and then some durn thing spoils it all. I mind it was that way with the Purselys when Johnnie, he went off some place they call West Point and didn't come back. And I always hated to see even a hoss sold off'n the farm.

But when it come ole Gabe's turn—good golly, my ole ears laid out so droopy they all give me the hoss laugh in St. Looie, where I landed in the market.

Got kind of a hard name amongst them other mules. I was sore, and they couldn't hee-haw around me none about where they come from an' who they was. I'm a Pursely mule—but I most plumb forgot my raisin' amongst them measly little runty mules I had to herd with.

They sold me down amongst the cotton pickers, and the doggondest hole a mule ever got into. I could hardly keep my heels off'n them chocolate-drops that drove me. I did cut loose at one of 'em that come careless-like up behind me—but shucks! I like to drove my hoofs up into my hocks, and that nigger just grinned and scratched where I hit 'im on the forehead, and says to me:

"Gabe, you ole scoun'el, you mighty nigh peeled me dat time! Yassuh, you might' nigh did!"

Next place I found myself was down amongst the rangers, carryin' a pack where there wasn't no trail half the time, but a durn good chance of gettin' shot up. I didn't take to that job a whole lot. Packin' an' huntin' cover from them rocks they calls bullets—seems like them rangers was just lookin' fer a spot to git ole Gabe killed off.

Bullets do kill yuh, if they git through the hide. I know; 'cause one hit a hoss, an' it made a hole plumb through him and he fell right down and never got up again. They just pulled the saddle off him, and I had to pack it back to camp on top of my load. No sir, I don't want none of them dang bullets landin' in my carcass.

They sold me. I heard it was on account of my talkin' so much when out on the trail. Seems like a pore ole mule couldn't hee-haw none at all, but some feller's give him a kick in the paunch or somethin' like that. I know I'm kinda talkative, and I've got

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cussed for it a-plenty. Why, even little Johnnie Pursely called me "Hee-haw," half the time, back home before he growed up and went off to be a soldier.

Nobody seemed to hate the sound of my voice like them rangers, though. They never talked themselves, and they never wanted anybody else to. Well, they never hurt my feelin's none when they up and sold me, 'cause I didn't like 'em nohow. Too much packin' and too little eatin', fer Gabe.

So then I landed here where I'm at, in a corral full of mules. At first I thought mebby it was another of them durned markets, but it ain't that. It's Army. Men all around, thick as flies at a water-hole. All dressed up the same—and by cracky, they've all got hats and pants and coats like Johnnie Pursely had last time I saw him, when they said he was a soldier. So I guess these is all soldiers like Johnnie.

It's a mighty big round-up of some kind—biggest I ever seen. I dunno how I'm goin' to like it, but I guess it's all right, mebby. If soldier work is good enough for Johnnie Pursely it's good enough for ole Gabe.

FIRST Bugle Time: *Tootie-toot-too!* There's a man gets out there in the big field and puts somethin' to his mouth and goes *Tootie-toot-too!* Then, like as if the house was afire, everybody starts runnin'. Sometimes they carry guns, sometimes they stop short and all stand in line, and then ag'in they carry tin cups as if they all wanted to git a drink at once. The hosses in the corrals act a heap like the men—in the bay-hoss corral and in the sorrel-hoss corral, too.

Why, I've seen 'em just perk up their ears and all rush over toward the gates as if they all wanted to go with them men. I'm keepin' both ears floppin' an' my eyes open, tryin' to find out what kind of a job this Army is for a mule. I've got a great big slab of leather and harness fixin's that durn near covers me up like a blanket. That's my pack outfit, but I ain't packed nothin' much, so fur. Just hay and stuff down to the river to where some more soldiers live.

It's bin several days since I've had a pack-riggin' on. I'm gettin' so doggone lazy I hate to hear the men comin' to drive us over to water. Army is sure some job. Regular feed, nothin' much to do, but switch flies and dream—sure beats anything since I left home.

The wagon-train mules have been haulin' forage—so I've learned they calls hay and grainstuffs in the Army. They got several loads to bring to the post—that's here where me and the soldiers live—but they've got a long time to do it in, so there's no kick comin' at all.

GREEN Grass Time: By golly, I sure am all fussed up! Here the other day the feller with the *tootie-toot-too* music got out there in the field and tooted, and all the officers went hot-footin' up to their main barn. There was more hustle and bustle than if the hull herd had quit the range in the night. "Buzz," he told me that we had went and got marchin' orders. But I ain't seen anything but a lot of danged excitement all at once. I guess mebby that's it.

Ole Gabe sure tries to do his part. I've bin brayin' and hee-hawin' till I'm plumb hoarse. The sign's high and the goin's look good. We're goin' somewheres. Not jest me, but everybody. Mules, hosses and soldiers and all. Right now I've got my nose-bag loaded with good oats, packed and waitin'—we'll go in the last section I heard the boss say. Guess that means train.

Lots of people come out here watchin' us gettin' ready, and I seen a feller with his girl standin' over near the water-works—they talked for a spell, and then he put his arms around her and kissed her. Doggone it, she jest bawled like a weanin' calf. He tried to talk her out of it, but she sure did yelp a heap. I'm durn glad there's no one to come and cheer me up with a hope that'll make me yaller.

"Don't git killed, dear," she begged 'im.

Now he's got a fat chance and long shot in that bet. He ain't got a thing t' say 'bout it. I've saw men git killed, and it never seemed like they nor anybody else liked it thata way.

LOADIN' Out Time: Gee, but I'm sure tired. I've been standin' here in line, a-waitin' for them to git the soldiers and the soldier hosses loaded, ever since last night. Of course, we did have somethin' to eat and drink, but just had to bed down on the soft side of a lot uh gravel. That makes a feller so tired he can hardly stand on his pins.

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There's more excitement here than I ever heard of before. First the trainmen come backin' in with a lot of stock cars or flats, with a few coaches hooked on. Then they bang the cars together several times. The hours slip by faster'n the devil; and 'fore they knows it, the men are hollerin' their fool heads off for chuck—then it's git the cooks to unloadin' the pots and pans ag'in. I'll bedanged if I believe we ever will git out of here.

AT THE Big Water-Hole: Lands sakes, I don't know if I'm dreamin', or what. This mornin' as I was standin' in the corral just up from the water's edge, along comes young Johnnie Pursely a-struttin' by in soldier clothes. I brayed right out loud at the sight of 'im. By his trimmin's he's a kinda straw boss; what I hear 'em call a "shave-tail," and he looks awful funny in his trappin's. He was passin' by and when I saw him a-comin' along with them bandy legs all so rigged up in boots, and jest steppin' it off, I walks over to the fence.

He musta bin thinkin' 'bout somethin' and in a hurry, 'cause he was just pickin' 'em up and layin' 'em down fast. When he got right close to me and the fence, I stuck my nose over and brayed just as loud as I could. He kinda jumped and stopped sudden-like, and says—

"—— jackass!"

And then he saw my angel-like face close to him, and he just stopped and looked. Then he crawled over the fence and walked around me—at a safe distance, which showed he'd bin raised around mules. I turned on my heels and went right up to 'im and rubbed my nose on 'im. Still he didn't seem to know me for certain, and walked away. But I follered right at his heels. When he stopped, I rubbed my cheek on his shoulder. He put his two hands on his hips and looked me over and said—

"Why, if it isn't ole Gabe!"

He walked aroun' me agin, and speakin' all the time.

"I believe it's Gabe, sure'n thunder. Yes sir, it is. How are yuh, ole Hee-haw?" and he pats me.

I just nosed him gently and looked behind me, where some of the other mules had come up to see who my friend was. It kinda made 'em all take notice of me, bein' on sech terms with an officer. So Lieutenant Pursely and me, we walks over across the corral to where one of the packers was standin'.

"Do you know where this mule came from?" he asked the packer.

"No, sir. That's Gabe, though—that's what every one here calls him."

Well, we talked and talked; he in his way and me in my own mule way. Says he:

"Why, Gabe, it sure seems good to see you again. Just think; you and I here in the Service together, and goin' to the Philippines together—it don't seem possible."

And he pats me just as gently as though I was some favorite charger in his troop. And me? I just hee-hawed a little more, to show him I was glad, too. Then he laid his face against my mealy muzzle and stroked it.

We talked for quite some spell, and finally he ups and hits me a broad-handed slap on the neck, and jumped plumb over that fence and disappeared in among some tents.

This place is all right—I like it heaps. I can't get enough to eat, though. They won't let us drink out of the big water-hole —they say she's worse'n alkali or copper water. One of the men said it was as salty as mackerel, whatever that is.

Lieutenant Pursely came over this evening. He waited till night-time and then come a-walkin' down along the fence, pretendin' he was just strollin' by—which he wasn't any sech a-thing. He wanted to see me; 'cause seein' me hits him the same as my seein' him makes me feel. I like to know that there's home-folks about, and durn him, so does he.

Well, he came over inside after a little, and walked up to where I was layin' down, and stroked my neck and back, and then playful-like, he pulled my ears. I don't like to have any one foolin' with my ears, but bein's it was Johnnie, I just couldn't get sore about it. Don't it make a feller feel queer when some one from back yonder —mebby, some one who used to peck you with rocks or torment you in some way— comes up to you with the friendly feelin'-like?

Well, he made me git right up, and he stood there with his arm around my neck, and didn't say nary a word at all for the longest time. Over where the packers hang

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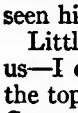
out there comes the sound of men singin'—it's a whole heap like the way them niggers did in Texas—they're singin' somethin' about the old folks at home.

'Fore I knowed it Johnnie begin shakin' and sobbin' like as if he was hurt er somethin'. I don't like to see my friends ailin', so I just had to rub him with my nose. He took it all good-naturedly, and got out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes. No, it ain't funny at all that a man, and especially one whose business is fightin', should cry. It's human and animal feelin's rolled together, and it shows there's a heart down inside of 'em that's a dang sight bigger'n a bullet ladle, too.

I was feelin' like as if I could see the old Mississippi as she slipped along on her way, with a big full moon just peepin' over the hills on t'other side, that made the shadow of the willows what fringed it over stretch clean across to where I used to stand with my mother, who was ole John Pursely's buggy mare.

After a while the bugles sounded "tattoo," and the singin' stopped. Johnnie put his arms around me. He let them hang there for a spell, and then they slipped down and he walked away without nary a word. When he reached the fence and crawled over it, and started up the road, I brayed *adios* to him.

Golly, but I'm tired—this day has been a hard one and chuck full of excitement. I guess I'll go over to where my friend May is beddin' down. Somehow I like her—not because she's the bell-mare, but just for her own self; and I don't give a doggone who knows it.



ON THE Big Water Hole: Here we are, all loaded and ready to leave. Right now the engines are grindin'. This durn thing ain't like no train I ever rode on. They call it a ship and a boat and it's big as a house. It's goin' on water, seems like, I dunno—I guess mebby it's all right or Johnnie Pursely wouldn't be in on the deal, and he is. I seen him and talked to him, a while back.

Little boats are alongside and pullin' at us—I can see 'em from this floor. I'm on the top floor right by the big smoke-stacks. Gee, there ain't near the people around that there was when the soldiers left. I guess we haven't got so many friends as they have.

It's gettin' dark, and all along the water it's lit up like the deuce—it's pretty, too. We're goin' along slow-like, but movin' some, 'cause I see the lights are gettin' fewer along the shore.

I'm beginnin' to feel awful queer-like—kinda dizzy and weak. It's hard to stand on my feet, 'cause the ship just leans one way and then another way till a pusson feels like the durn thing's goin' to tip over.

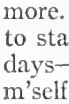
The boss came down my aisle a while ago and give the men orders about feedin' us fellers. We're not to git any feed but once a day, and they're fixin' up some kind of dope for us to take. Water ain't plentiful like it was in the corrals, either. Well, the way I feel now, I don't care much whether I ever git any more. The rest of the boys feel about the same, from the looks of 'em. Their ears are lopped down, and there's a glassy look in their eyes—some of 'em have laid down.

Blame this durn ship ridin'. I wish I could sleep, but I haven't closed an eye since I bedded down. I'm a sick mule. My stomach just aches, and my mouth waters to beat the band. Some of the cow-punchers that are goin' with us are awful sick—one of 'em asked another feller to heave him overboard, whatever that means.

Mornin' agin, but I don't give a durn. That poor mule in the stall next to me sure is down and out—he ain't opened nary eye since late last night, and he just groans somethin' fierce. I bulieve he's cashin' in, from the looks of 'im and the sounds he makes.

I heard one of the ship's men say that we'd git into a place called Hondelula—somethin' like that—in 'bout five days more. Purty howdydo, that a feller has to stand this here ship ridin' for five more days—I don't think I'll last that long, m'self.

I tried to eat today, but couldn't go 'er. I feel as much like eatin' as I do like flyin'.



SEEIN' Land Time: 'Pon my word, if there ain't land right out there—lots of it, too, an' I didn't think there was any more of it. I can see people and houses, and we must be purty close from the way it looks to me.

Well sir, there's a whole heap of the purtiest kind of singin' outside there on the water, and tiny boats—why, I never did see the likes of 'em before in my life. Them

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folks are all brown-colored—not like them Texas niggers, though—just brown, and they are smilin' at us. I'spect they're glad to see us.

I heard one of them boys on the boat say we wasn't goin' to stay here more'n three or four hours, and then we was goin' to high-tail it for them dang Philippines. He said we'd git there in about twenty-eight days more. Lordy, do we have to stay right here and git sicker an' sicker and wobble about this durn ship near a month more?

Well, I ain't the one to whine 'bout my goin' in sech a fix, but I'll be doggoned if they ever gits this jackass on another boat. Not me, no sirree! I'll let 'em shoot me if they want to, but no more of this water-hole travelin' for ole Gabe!

I hear the whistle blowin', and hear the rattlin' of chains—they must be untyin' her to leave. It makes me sick to even think of goin' out there where we can't see the shore agin.

We're off. Right now the shore is gettin' dimmer an' dimmer all the time as we float along. It's gettin' late, too. They've got no lights burnin' on this floor—or deck, as I've learned they call it.

One of the hosses, farther up toward the front of the ship, fell and broke his leg last night or early this mornin', just 'fore we hit Gondelula, and they just hauled 'im up to the big door that's cut in the ship and throwed him out in the water. Nice kind of way to treat him! 'Course, they took a hammer an' hit 'im in the head first, and then when he slid out the door one of the ship men said—

"There's some good shark bait."

I'll bet if he had uh been close to me then, I'd have kicked the daylights outa him. They ain't got no business to talk thataway 'bout that poor hoss. He couldn't help breakin' his leg, the way this dang thing rolls. But when I hear one of them guys, that never had the nerve to crawl on the back of a mean critter, speakin' like that, I just git an itchy pair of heels for 'im right away.

I'm feelin' better'n what I did. I had some hay for breakfast, but never touched my oats at all. The water here is not any too good, either—alkali, er somethin' that tastes a heap like it.

Most of the cowpunchers are well again. They sit around and play cards or swap yarns when they're not cleanin' the stalls or feedin' this herd. They don't like it a durn bit—I heard a couple of 'em sayin' that if they ever got a boot-heel planted in Wyoming soil ag'in, it'd take a —— of a pile of men to drag 'em on a ship. Then they started off talkin' 'bout round-ups—I suppose, it bein' late in the Fall now, they got thinkin' of beef round-up, and shippin' time and then a Winter ridin' chuck line er somethin'.

AFTER the Typhoon: I've seen hard storms and bad weather on the ranges and back home. I've even felt the tail end of a cyclone, that come from over Kansas way, when I was in Missouri. But I'll be switched if I ever, in all my born days, seen anything that could hold a candle to this here storm we had out on the water-hole. Lordy, I nearly faint now when I think of it.

We plowed along and the punchers say we was somewhere, 'tween a place called Guam and the Philippines, when the water commenced to git rough as the dickens. The wind commenced to blow awful hard, too, and the ship rolled and pitched like a bronc. It kept it up for several days, and then stopped most as sudden as it started.

I was kept busy tryin' to stand on my feet, then it got so bad I couldn't even lay down with any comfort. Honest to goodness, the waves rolled as high as most of the hills back there in Missouri. They'd spill on this floor, when they'd hit the ship, and it'd near drown us. Why there would be a roar and splash to it that'd just 'bout scare a feller out of his wits.

I hear 'em tell it that the captain, as I learned they call the foreman of this outfit, tried to keep her headed into it—he claimed that it makes it ride the waves a whole lot easier. But after a while he found he should have gone the other way, so he tried to turn her around and go with the wind. The doggone ole tub just wallered in 'tween two waves, and I thought sure it would sink. By cracky, for a while I would be standin' on my ear and then on my sides, but no time did I get to my feet. The rest of the stock was farin' about the same.

Then men commenced to holler at one another and shout orders, tryin' to be heard above the roar of the wind and waves. I was plumb scared, and ole Gabe ain't the

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one to git excited over small trifles, either. I was strugglin' to my feet er tryin' to, when I heard a rough voice right up above me yell—

"Cut away the superstructure, and run them hosses overboard!"

I didn't know what he meant by that superstructure thing, but I sure savvied that hoss talk all right. Run us overboard? Heavens! Then the sound of axes cutting and hammers poundin' right close, hit my ears. Gee, but I was nervous—just made me sick at heart to hear 'em workin' an' hollerin'.

Along comes a man on the run with a big saw and one of the punchers asked what they was goin' to do. He answered that they was tryin' to cut loose the temporary stalls that had been built up on this floor. Stalls and horses had to go into the water, he told him. It was awful dark—darker'n a stack uh black cats, but they kept on workin', and the longer they worked the more they'd yell and holler 'bout it, and the more nervous I'd git. Just any minute I expected to fall into the water.

Them waves broke away up above us, 'cause I was standin' in water up to my belly 'fore I knowed it. Them engineer fellers went runnin' and yellin' to some one below us to start the bilge pumps.

"We'll be sinkin' 'fore long, if you don't git 'em workin'!" he said, and ran along the floor.

There's one thing I'm sure proud of, and that is Johnnie Pursely. By golly, he's some boy, I'm tellin' you. He was one of the bosses put in charge of the men on the boat, and when they was goin' to cut away a section of them stalls right where I was standin' he comes hoppin' up there.

"What you goin' to do here?" he yells.

They told him they was ordered by the captain to put all of the stock, that was up there where we was standin', overboard.

"Well, wait a minute!" he hollered, and went and looked under the bridge where there was an empty stall—belongin' to the hoss who broke his leg. He come back and took down the bars behin' me, and when the ship rolled just right to suit him, he says, "Come on, Gabe," and led me out and hustled me into that one empty stall.

Honest I was so rattled I never hee-hawed my thanks—but I was sure one grateful mule.

"Can't throw my ole Gabe overboard—not if I know anything about it!" he said as he patted me on the neck.

"You're sure a lucky mule," nickered a bay hoss in the stall next to me. "If that man hadn't been your friend, you'd be out there in the water 'bout now."

Well, I'm the mule that shore knowed how lucky I was. When I turned my eyes to where they had almost finished cutting away the stalls, I could see Lieutenant Pursely standin' there under the light of a big lamp. He looked awful down-hearted. He liked horses so well he just hated to see 'em killed thataway.

After I got quieted down from the excitement of that night, I said to myself—

"Gabe, whatever there is of you now or to come, you shore owe it to the kid."

That's the way it went all night long. When mornin' come, I'll swear I never saw sech a sight—nor do I ever want to see the likes of it again. There on the high waves was a whole lot of stalls tossin' and rollin' about and in 'em all was hosses and mules—crippled hosses, brayin' mules and squealin' hosses and dead mules. They tell me there was nigh on three hundred head of 'em all told.

First thing'd happen, the ship would roll away over on her sides, and just shudder as if she was scared of them big waves, and then it seemed as if she was goin' to plunge front-first right down outa sight. An' up there on the top of a wave close by a puson could see them poor hosses all a-strugglin' and fightin' to free theirselves from them dang stalls. Then the ship'd be up again that time, an' up dang nigh straight, too. She'd be a little more steady and the men'd take sech times to heave over another section, with panic-crazed hosses and mules. The storm got no better. All that day and the next and the next—seven days all told was we in that mess.

After things did kinda settle down and we got started again on our way to the Philippines, we met another ship. It didn't look like our ship looked to me when I come on it. It had great big things stickin' out on the sides and in the center of it. They wasn't smoke-stacks, either. An' the men was all dressed alike, 'cause I saw 'em with my own eyes right out this very winder. They had white hats and blue clothes.

That ship stopped when it got right close, and the foreman asked our foreman if everything was all right. He told him that

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e had to run all them hosses over the side o keep his ship from goin' down. Now if hat was what he done it for; I'm sorry for hem poor hosses, but I shore am doggone lad he done it—or where'd me and Johnnie e now? I got in a bog one time, 'fore I ome to Texas, and I thank you that was nough goin' down for me, let alone this big ater-hole sinkin'.

After the two bosses talked quite consid-rable, the other ship went away—went ight back the way she come, and, golly, ut she shore has got some speed. 'Twasn't ny time at all till I couldn't see a thing of t but a tiny bit of black smoke that was curlin' out behind.

PHILIPPINES Time: At last we're here. Thank heavens. We came rollin' into this place early this ornin', and they didn't hardly wait till ey got her fastened to somethin' down the water, 'fore they was loadin' us fel-rs on big flat boats an' haulin' us toward e houses where the town was.

These folks are shore funny little devils look at. They're just about the same lor as them folks we saw in Hondelula—nly these people most all go unshod and ear their shirts outside their pants—little ort pants at that. They shore do talk ueer, too. One of 'em that was holdin' y tie-rope commenced talkin' to another e standin' right there, and it sounded so anged funny I reached over and let off a ig *Haw-w-he-haw-he* right in his ear. olly, but he did jump.

After a while the packers took us through e town, and then I got to see some of eir hosses. I just hee-hawed till my des ached—so would you, too. They's e tiniest little things you ever seen. hey ain't much bigger'n them little Shet-nds we have in Missouri—you see most 'em with the circuses, though. Them ilipino ponies pull little two-wheeled uggies that carry about two persons.

'Nuther thing, when we stopped, we und a good big corral there all ready an' aitin' for us—that's a mighty good thing bout this Army job, you can always bank n a place to sleep an' plenty to eat and rink. Even when you're hikin' over the ountry they shore take good care of yuh.

My pack-train had one corral to them-lves. We don't have to mix up with any ne outside our own crowd. Right next to us there is the corral for the officers' mounts and it is chuck full of hosses, too. They're a sociable sort of a bunch—the way they all come over to the fence when we got in and asked us about our trip across the water-hole.

Johnnie Pursely came over today, and opened the gate and walked up to me—I didn't hardly know 'im at first, 'cause he was all dressed up in white togs—looked awful purty, too. He talked with me for quite some spell, and then another officer hollered at him from the road and he went away, but I saw him noddin' his head toward me as they strolled down toward town. Golly, I think a heap of that kid.

KATABALOGAN CAMP: Here I am. Right down here in the measliest little town I ever heard tell of. It's on an island called Samar, and we can look right across the water at another island they call Leyte. This burg is nothin' but a little ole flat all dotted with huts, with a lot of big hills, right back of it, all covered with a grass and brush that's new to me.

We was ordered out of Manila right shortly after we had made camp there. Some of the men tell it that there is heaps of fightin' to be done down here. They also spoke with one another about an ole war-hoss named Lukbon. They say he is shore a wolf, and from all I've gathered, they aims to send us on his tracks right shortly.

These native people here don't look a bit good to me, none of 'em, and I figger that I'm some jedge of humans, too. They just seem about as ornery as a coyote and just as sneakin'. Why, I wouldn't trust one of 'em any further'n I could throw heels an' lift a four-year-old off his pins.

When we landed here, I 'spected to see some flat-boats come out an' git us fellers. But nary a one showed up to take us to land. They just had a chute on this boat, and they'd put our packin' blinds over our eyes, and take us up on it, and then when we was standin' all quiet as could be, doggone my cats, if they don't just up and tilt that thing a little and the first thing we knowed we was over our heads in the water. I'm not much of a swimmer, in fact no mules have ever broke records for that sorta stuff. I landed *ka-plunk* right smack in it, and I never did git to touch bottom.

Then up I come to the top of the water, and snorted right square in a man's face—

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I was outa wind. He cussed me till there won't be a fly light on Gabe for a long time to come. Then he grabbed me by the halter and jerked me around and pointed me toward the land. No, sir, he didn't have to drive me at all. I just clawed water like sixty right then and there, and purty soon I hit sand with my off fore-hoof, and eased myself down and rested, and then walked out to the shore.

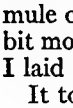
Standin' there on the shore, and laughin' as if his sides'd bust, was that young hound, Johnnie Pursely. He was dressed in brown clothes. He comes up and slaps me on the rump and jerked my tail and hollered—

"Get wet, Gabe?"

And I swings 'round and humps my back at him, and lays back my ears, like I was goin' to lift him plumb off the earth. But 'f course I wouldn't, and he knowed it and laughs some more. So I just walked off and left him.

After a little, when I had cooled off my temper, and he left to go up-town somewheres, I'd forgave him, and brayed at him to come again and see me. He will, too, 'cause the kid likes me better'n any hoss or mule out here, and he don't like me a durn bit more'n I like him; and that goes just as I laid it.

It took 'bout an hour to unload all them hard-tails and hosses. After a little, when we had all sun-dried ourselves, and was rollin' in the sand, they took us to the corrals and fed us. It's all right now.



AFTER the Hike: Well, this came mighty nigh not bein' recorded by ole Gabe, I'm tellin' yuh. I come awful close to bein' at the bottom of the Gondara River.

It was Monday of last week when Lieutenant Pursely left camp with twenty-five men on a hike to the upper Gondara River to try and round up ole Lukbon. He's bin actin' up like sixty in this neck o' the woods for some time past, now.

Johnnie got his orders, and took his men and left early in the mornin'—half past four, to be exact. I know, 'cause he came by the corral and I brayed at him and walked over to the fence where he stood. He patted me while the men went on walkin' by. He didn't stand there long, as he said he just stopped to tell me *adios*, which I've learned means so-long. I wondered how long he'd be gone but he didn't say nary a word about that, and I felt lonesome for the next few days.

Then it got out that Johnnie and his men were long overdue—they didn't take chuck enough to last 'em over three days in the field. No word come from him. Officers most always take some trusted native to be used as runners between them and the home camp. But not one of his runners came back at all—they was insurrectos themselves, that's what they was. It made the ole colonel worry a heap.

He waited and waited. He asked every one he could think of that would know anything about them, for news. No one could tell him a single thing about the men.

"If I don't hear from that boy by tonight, I'll send out a searchin' party," he told another officer as they walked by our camp, on the way from his headquarters to the beach. "Better have Nelson get fifty men and a pack-train ready to hit trail in the mornin' early, if no word comes from Pursely."

That was the last I heard as they both dropped down over the sand-bank out of sight.

That talk I heard from the ole man, as every pusson here in Katabalogan calls him, made me worry a dang sight more'n he did, and I know he was frettin' a heap about the kid.

I got to thinkin' about the weather and one thing and another. It had been threatenin' rain here for several days—it had been rainin' up in the mountains for a week er more already. When it rains in this country, it rains good and plenty. I waited until night came and kept my ears perked for orders. Sure enough it comes at ten o'clock—just after we had all settled down for the night.

"Crowley," says the officer who came in the night, "you'll get a train ready and packed at the Q. M. depot by five o'clock. They'll be packed to the limit!" he says.

I couldn't git my thoughts together at all. I was thinkin' of the kid. Where was he? Was he alive? Was he out in them hills starvin'? Then I would ramble off into some kind of a hazy dream of men shoutin' orders of some kind; high waters, packin' the limit on the trip—I didn't know what I was thinkin' 'bout 'ceptin' I was always comin' back to Johnnie and what might happen to 'im.

I was awful glad when over the town to

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he east I saw the first orange and golden ays of the sun that would shine there in a ew hours—it takes so dang long for it to it up through them tall coconut trees nd over that highest hill. Just as I noiced it, I turned toward the bunk-house where the packers sleep—already there was igns of men stirrin' about, and soon I saw hem all hustlin' out to lay out the pack. Then some more of 'em started throwin' ut feed to us, and gettin' as busy as could e.

It didn't take them ole cowpunchers, that as our packers, long to slap our riggin's n us. Me, I was carryin' the packers' amp. They headed us out after the bell-nare, and at a good-sized walk, we lit out or the depot.

There we saw boxes and cans and sacks ll set out an' waitin'. The boss packer got usy and laid out the loads and divided it mong us as even as he could and said—

"Let's go, boys!"

Then it was soon over. By the time the oldiers come up we was all lined out in ur right places and nibblin' grass along the lingy little street.

Natives, behind the thatch walls of them uts, was all peekin' out at us. There's ot a single doubt in ole Gabe's mind, but hat 'fore we left town there was messen-ers goin' in all directions to let them other *ugus* know all about it.

Right then I heard Captain Belson as he aid—

"Forward! March!"

The relief column swung down toward he first little hills that lay to the westward f the town, and toward the Gondara coun-ry, with the pack-train bringin' up the ear under the guard of a few picked men.

You know hikin' over the hills and wamps of the Philippines is a dang sight liff'rent to trailin' out through the sage-rush, and up-draws and cañons back home —it's just a man-killin' job, that's what it s. We had the first day some awful bam-oo thickets and rice-dykes to cross. The ice-dykes had been flooded, and the only lace we could walk decent-like, was on the ittle flat ridges that hold in the water—the est of it was boggy.

The bamboo was so thick that the sol-diers, most of whom carried bolos, just had to chop their way through it, and then we would follow them up.

We did not stop when we got through the rice-dykes and bamboo, nor did we make camp till it was too dark to see our way good. The captain always kept his eyes peeled for a good spot where we wouldn't be ambushed. He found a place just on the top of a little rise that was a small mesa. After scouting out the country around it, he came back and laid out camp. Gee, but I was glad. The whole blamed outfit was glad as fur's that goes.

After the doctor had examined the water, and the packers had taken off my pack—the chuck outfit of the pack-train—and I had a heap of it, too—we made camp for the night.

Everything passed off all right durin' the night, and we got an early start in the mornin'. The sergeant of the guard called all hands at four o'clock, and every fellow hustled his breakfast together. Then we hit the trail ag'in.

That day took us farther along toward the mountains up to where we'd cross the Gondara, the same as foot soldiers did. We saw a heap of signs all along. One place we come to, there was beef-tins and other stuff, that showed 'em we was on the right track—we just stepped out a little faster, watchin' the groun' all the time for foot-prints and more signs. The showers had washed most of 'em away, but I saw one er two places where tracks was as plain as a registered brand.

'Long toward sundown we was caught in the rain, and it made our goin' much harder. We made camp in that rain as soon as night come on, but I never got any sleep at all. When I'd git a likely-lookin' spot to lay my bones, and drop down on my knees and lay over, there would be another one of the dangdest downpours come over me, you ever saw in your life.

I'd just have to git up out of there, and then amble over and join the other boys as they all stood bunched together near the packers' camp. I certainly was a happy mule when mornin' did come!

Doggone it, this steady hikin', day in and day out, without any let up at all, ain't what it's cracked up to be, now I'm tellin' you. I begun to feel kinda tender under my blankets—sweat scalds, I guess—I didn't look at 'em. Some of the other fellers had to have their backs doctored up by the boss. And the soldiers, they all got sore feet, judgin' from the way they hoofed it along over that trail. I call it a trail, but

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it is just a place runnin' along that ain't got no trees or brush much.

I reckon it must have been 'long about three o'clock on our third day out, that we sighted a river. The captain said it was the Gondara; I guess he knows. We come up to it durin' a hard spell of the rainin', and bulieve me, it sure looked snaky.

I've seen a few high-waters m'self, but this flood certainly did top the bunch of 'em. There she was, all muddy and boilin', and purty durn wide, too. Trees and logs and all kinds of driftwood was runnin'. She was nigh bank-full at the place we come up to it—just a little open place big enough to hold our bunch.

"Goin' to be nasty fordin', Lieutenant," said the captain as he walked up to the bank to git a better peep at it.

"Yes, sir, but the mules'll take it all right!" he blurted out, as knowin' as a hoss-trader.

Whatever the captain thought of his talk, I don't know—but I don't figger it went a great ways with him, 'cause he never even answered the shave-tail, but called the boss packer, who come up on the long lope.

"How does it look to you, Crowley?" he asked the boss. "Think the animals can make it?"

"It's purty risky, sir."

"Well, we'll try it, at once," says the captain.

They caught us all up and cinched our riggin's a little tighter. I bein' next to May in the line-up, I was expected to make a good effort to follow the bell-mare.

May didn't exactly hanker for that trip across there—I saw that when she turned her head, and nickered at me not to crowd her too much. Now she didn't have to worry 'bout me over-crowdin' her, 'cause I was just as anxious as she was 'bout the sense of crossin' that durn river.

The boss took May by the lead rope, and slowly walked her up to the edge of the water, and let her smell of it. Then by golly, he had two fellers standin' behind who shoved her into it. Now there wasn't a thing for May to do then but to hit out swimmin' fer dear life and t' other side. She did that, too, and when she had got a little ways, I just dropped my head down to look to my footin' first, and then plunged right in after her.

Whew! Lordy me! I certainly did bargain m'self a job right there—talk about work. Honest, I never heard of work before. Why, dang it all, I had to work to beat the dickens to git any gait out of that water travelin' 'tall.

The last I saw of May, was just as I went in over my head at the first plunge—I was kept busy after that, tryin' to take care uh m'self. I pinted my nose upstream—same as the rangers had taught me in fordin' the Pecos—and just pawed water to beat the devil.

I was swimmin' along the best I could. All of a sudden, I hit my nigh knee on one of them durn trees that was ridin' 'neath the water, and I skinned it up, too. Then I got m'self anuther tree all wrapped around my legs—I soon shucked myself loose from that thing, an' hit out all the harder to git over on the other shore, as soon as I could.

I saw, by the way the bank was passin' me that I was sure fallin' down-stream fast, but I was gettin' closer to the bank all the time. Then I kept my eyes peeled for a place to land. I soon spotted one. I was driftin' slower then, bein' so close to the shore. I headed right for it for fear somethin' else'd be comin' along fer my legs to tangle in, and drag me past that landin' place. I don't know how long I was comin' across, but I know that it was no short spell.

WHEN I had planted my feet deep in that soggy mud, that I had fer footin', and pulled m'self up the bank, a tireder mule you never saw.

After I had blowed an' puffed a while, and got my wind, I turned around to look for May. I couldn't see her nowhere in sight. I brayed to her that I was all right, and to come over where I was. She never answered at all. Then I looked up the river—I knowed that the outfit was up there somewhere. I thought mebby she'd passed me on her way up there, while I was comin' down-stream in the water.

I walked along lookin' at the groun' fer tracks, but nary a one did I see. I brayed and brayed to her, but she didn't answer me.

After a little I heard the soldiers talkin' and yellin', tryin' to git a big black mule into the water—he sure was doin' a good job at fightin' 'em off with both hind-feet. When I started off along the way we was

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travelin', he hadn't taken the river yet.

I ambled along slowly, hee-hawin' up the trail, just pokin' along at a purty good clip. I knew it was gettin' toward sundown, if there'd been any sun.

All of a sudden like, I saw somethin' staggerin' through the brush—away ahead. It was a man, and he runnin', er tryin' to run toward me. By golly, I stopped right where I was! I don't want any human, I don't happen to know fairly well, to come pacin' up to me in no sech places as Samar.

The man stopped, and went to the ground like as if he'd had his pins knocked from under 'im. I was brayin' like all gitout for May all the time; but when I saw him fall, I just put down my nose and walked on kinda-cautious like—'cause I saw he had soldier-clothes on.

Doggone my cats! I couldn't bulieve my own eyes. I musta got some of that mud out of the river in 'em. I dropped my head to my knees, and rubbed them over with the soft hair, and then looked up the trail again. It couldn't be, but it was. I could hear 'im now, and he was callin':

"Gabe! Gabe! My God, Gabe! Bless your ole hide, Gabe, it's me! Why, ole Hee-haw—don't yuh know Johnnie?"

I just stood and looked at 'im, and then walked on a little faster toward 'im—he looked as if he was sufferin' to beat the devil. He tried to run up to me, but he was so durn weak and wabbly he couldn't. Behind 'im come his men. Their clothes was all ragged and they walked wabbly, too, and quarreled and cussed as they walked. They didn't have any guns to hurt any one with—I heard afterward that they'd thrown them away in their craziness spells.

When the kid come up to me, I'll swear I never saw sech a face on a human before. It was all swollen, and raw where wood leeches of some sort—not cattle-ticks, but just leeches—had burrowed into his skin. His hat was gone, and his coat was torn and muddy. He still had his six-shooter and belt, but not a leggin' on 'im.

He tried to walk and run at the same time, and kinda fell against my shoulder and then doggone nigh strangled me to death with them hugs of his'n.

"Bless you, Gabe! I heard you, ole Hee-haw. You've saved us, ole boy," he bawled, with his face ag'in my neck.

It didn't feel good to have that boy away out there in the Islands a-cryin' like that! When I turned my head around to nose the kid on the shoulder, just to sorta comfort 'im, I saw all the men a-racin', as best they could, to git to us. A sorry race it was, though. They staggered and fell down on the ground and would git up, and run a little farther, and then fall down again.

The kid was weak hisself, but when he heard 'em all com'n' up, he braced hisself as best he could and took charge of 'em, when they commenced to tear my pack off.

They was so hungry that they never stopped to fry the bacon at all—they gnawed it raw like dogs. Then they took a bayonet from one of the belts, and stabbed the hard-tack can and pried it open. Johnnie just stepped in and made 'em use some sense 'bout their eatin'. Weak as he was, he had to knock a couple o' 'em down to do it, but by golly, he learned 'em who was boss. I was standin' ready to lambaste a couple with my heels, if they'd fought 'im back!

In a small watertight can in the pack, the kid found some dry matches. He got some water out of a dyke close by, an' made coffee and cooked some of the bacon. The others helped 'im as much as they could, poor devils, but they was most all in.

We didn't move that night. That is, we didn't cross the river, but went to the banks, and the kid hollered across to the captain that he was all right for the night, and told 'im about findin' me. The other soldiers was waitin' fer the water to fall so they could foller the trail.

The next mornin' we got across all right, and when I did reach the bank, with the kid on my back, the boss packer runs up to git me, he was so glad to see me again. But Johnnie, he hung onto my lead-rope like as if I was his mule. And, doggone it, I was plumb tickled when the packer walked off and left me with the kid.

It didn't take us long to git ready to back-trail fer camp. When they got May caught up, we started on our way. The boss packer comes and says—

"I'll take the mule for you, Lieutenant."

"No, you won't! I'll take care of ole Gabe m'self!"

And he just led me along slow-like, and patted me onct in a while; walkin' alongside my shoulder, with his hand on my withers most all the way. Golly, but I was a proud mule that day!

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COMFY CAMP: Things are sorta comin' my way lately. I ain't in the pack-train any more—you might as well say I ain't. I'm standin' over here in a little corral, that's all my own, and I ain't got a durn thing to do but switch off flies, and roll and sleep, and keep a weather eye peeled fer a certain officer that comes by the corral along 'bout feed-time, and slips me a nice measure of oats. Then he pats my ole gray-streaked face, and rubs some medicine on my sore legs. He stays with me a heap longer'n he used to 'fore we went on the hike.

Every time he goes to leave he puts an arm 'round my neck, and squeezes me hard enough to shut off my wind, and says—

"You durn ole ornery cuss, I love every hair in your measley hide."

An' I'm beginnin' to think he does, too. And if he's thinkin' I hate him, he's plumb crazy, that's all.

FOR FRANCE

BY NEVIL G. HENSHAW

HE LOOKED very small and old as he plodded on in the hot Louisiana sunshine. From one hand dangled an empty bridle. Presently Durand, the baker, came along and, pulling up his cart, addressed him.

"Well, *Père* Parmentier! You have done it then?" The priest raised his bridle.

"As you see. I am keeping this in remembrance."

"He was a good horse—the Swallow."

Père Parmentier's pride was pathetic:

"Good! You do not know. He skimmed, that Swallow, answering the toll of death, the peal of marriage, the wail of the newborn child. Good, you say? Why the buyers offered two hundred dollars. When I refused, saying I made a gift, they pressed the money into my hand. It will send many loaves to the Belgians."

"And what will you do now?"

"I will walk. It will take more time, that is all," replied the priest.

"You are sure you have done right by yourself?"

Père Parmentier's tone became patient:

"You do not understand, my son. You are not from France like myself. When your country calls, you too, will answer. France needs both men and horses. While I am useless, the Swallow is in his prime. I have only done the little that I could."

Durand shrugged.

"*Bien, mon père.* Yet I do not know. To me it seemed enough to send all your savings across the water. To send also your only horse appears too much. The sun is bad, and you are not used to walking. Even now you look sick while I, unfortunately, am going the wrong way." Recalling his customers, he clucked to his horse. "But that is your affair, *mon père.* Without my animal I could not live."

Père Parmentier spoke in farewell:

"It is not a question of living, my son. It is a question of France."

After Durand had gone *Père* Parmentier trudged off in the opposite direction. It was dreadfully hot, and his country church lay five long miles away. His housekeeper had advised him to wait in town for a lift, but he had been in a hurry to get home.

A mile farther *Père* Parmentier stopped suddenly to draw a hand across his brow. He felt queer and dizzy, and there seemed to be something the matter with his eyes. A slow, blurred look assured him that there was no one in sight. Just ahead, at the roadside, a hackberry cast a deep shade. He would have to wait for his lift after all.

As he started again, *Père* Parmentier began to stagger.

"Come, this will not do," he muttered. "A little more and you will be ill."

Reaching the shade, *Père* Parmentier tumbled limply down, and groped about until his back found the rough bark of the hackberry. He felt very sleepy now and he began to realize that, once he dropped off, he would not wake up again. Yet somehow he did not greatly care. He had done his best, and without his horse he would be terribly alone.

At first *Père* Parmentier thought of the Swallow, gripping his empty bridle with a little grimace of pain. Then he thought of France, so that he was smiling when he closed his eyes.

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GASTON OLAF and BIG BUSINESS

A FOUR-PART STORY CONCLUSION . . . .

by HENRY OYEN

Author of "Gaston Olaf," "Little Marie," etc.

XXII

TOM PINE stared coldly at his partner.

"Now, I'll be darned, Gaston Olaf, if this ain't too much from you," he expostulated. "Here I go to the trouble of laying out here in the snow and catching more reumatiz' to get a good fair crack at Bradley, and just when I get my chance you fall on me and spoil it. Don't you want me to get even?"

"No," said Gaston.

"All right," snapped Tom. "If you feel he's your meat, there's the rifle; go ahead and get him."

"No. There'll be no shooting."

Tom Pine spat disgustedly into the snow.

"Well, I will be darned. Gaston—Gaston Olaf, you don't mean to say you got any doubts that it was Bradley who had our mill burned and blown up, do you?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, what in Sam Hill ails you then? Have you got religion? You don't mean to say you let a man do you dirt like that and not go get him? Eh?"

"No. But there isn't going to be any shooting. This isn't that kind of a game. Bradley's set out to prove that he's a better man than I am, and that we can't log in this district if he says no. Shooting him wouldn't prove anything. I'm out to beat him; I'm going to show him that we can log here in spite of him. Tom Pine, you put your old fire-eating thoughts out of that head of yours for the time being. You come back to camp with me.

"The mill's gone, and the lumber with it, but we ain't licked yet. When we are, it will be time to think of shooting. We've still got our camp, and we've still got our timber. We can't make any more lumber this Winter, but we can make saw-logs. And we're going to do it; we're going to show Bradley that a little thing like burning our mill won't stop us, won't even make us hesitate."

Tom's wide-eyed stare indicated the shock which this speech dealt him.

"Good Cripes! Holy, red-roaring Judas Priest!" he exploded. "To think I'd ever live to hear you tap yourself of a lot of gas like that. Why don't you go over and kiss him? Eh?"

He tore himself loose and waved his old hands at the heavens.

"Out there's the mill we sweated blood to get, nothing left of it but a lot of black timbers and red iron, and over there's the man who's responsible. And you—you don't wiggle a finger to get him. You—" words failed him; he choked and clawed the atmosphere in futile rage—"you—*business man!*" he

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exploded, and marched straight off into the timber.

Gaston chuckled grimly to himself as he followed his partner.

"Business man; that's it," he mused. "I'll be civilized and play the game according to the rules of business. I don't like it —but it's what she wants."

So Ethel's words in the woods on the day she drove out to remonstrate with Gaston had saved Bradley's life.

The destruction of the mill was an all but fatal blow. From the sale of the lumber sawed during the Winter had been derived the money for operating expenses. Now this source was stopped. To think of obtaining a new mill, bringing it North, and setting it up for further sawing in the Winter months was out of the question. There would be no new mill until open weather in the Spring, when the drive behind the booms would be as good as money in the bank.

In the meantime there was the problem of financing the logging-camp; of meeting the payments for timber rights due on the first of next month. Gaston had decided to forget the mill for the present, and to concentrate the entire energies of the partnership upon increasing the harvest of logs. The passing of the mill released several teams and teamsters for work in the woods, and, save for the high-priced sawyers and the engineer, the mill-men would take on as lumberjacks.

Tom Pine in camp was worth half a dozen men; and it might just be possible that by speeding up the daily production of footage per man by, say ten per cent. the loss of the mill might be written off by warm weather. Remained then the task of securing the money due the owners of the land on which they were operating, as well as a good, round sum for running expenses.

On Saturday afternoon, Gaston went to their lawyer, Hollenbeck, with every degree of confidence. Money was proverbially easy in a mining camp, and the sum required was a bagatelle in comparison to the amounts carelessly tossed away in mining deals. Hollenbeck listened in silence until Gaston had completed his statement.

"It amounts to about fifteen thousand dollars, then, that you'll need to see you through?" said the lawyer at last.

"Just about. Say fifteen thousand."

"Gad! I'm sorry I haven't got it, Thorson," said Hollenbeck warmly.

"You? Why, I'm not asking you for it, George," laughed Gaston in surprise. "I just want you to do the negotiating for us."

"I understand. But nevertheless I repeat, I'm sorry I haven't got it to loan you."

"Why?"

The lawyer shook his head and replied slowly:

"Because old man, you'll have an awful time finding anybody in camp who will loan you that much money."

"Why?"

"Money is awful tight here just now, for one thing."

"Tight! What kind of talk is that? There's old Noisy Smith who sold out for half a million a month ago, and——"

"Smith didn't sell out."

"He didn't?"

"No. The deal was all ready to be closed, but the Boston bunch that was buying sent a field man up to investigate. When he saw what the situation was—and is—he advised against purchase, and Noisy still has his claims on his hands."

"What do you mean by his finding what the situation is, George?"

"That the Syndicate has got a strangle hold on the camp. They were wise in staying out."

"Members of the Cold Feet tribe, eh?" said Gaston.

"Hm. Good business men."

"All right. Let it go at that. Noisy hasn't got the money, but certainly there must be plenty of others who have. You get out and rustle, George. Fifteen thousand for six months on a first mortgage on our timber. It ought to be a cinch."

Hollenbeck replied deliberately:

"I can't get it for you in the camp."

You—can't?" Gaston stiffened. "George, has Bradley been to see you?"

The lawyer laughed bitterly.

"No such luck. I am still unbought and poor. No. The minute I woke up that morning and heard your mill had gone I figured how things would be with you. So I hiked down to the bank and saw McCullough. Well, I discovered something of interest there: The Syndicate owns the bank now. Rapidly developing business, the Syndicate.

"Then I began pussy-footing among the men I knew had money. If I'd had a proposition in Florida or Kamchatka they might have listened, but to loan money

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on anything in this camp—nothing doing! The bottom is out of folks' confidence here; the Syndicate's kicked it out. I didn't say who I wanted it for, except once, to young Potter, the broker. Well, I didn't get anything from him."

"What did he say?" demanded Gaston.

Hollenbeck grinned.

"He said he never bet on a horse who'd had two legs kicked off in the middle of a race."

Gaston laughed.

"Sweet and to the point. So that's the way they look at us, is it? 'Two legs kicked off.' But there's a devil of a lot of kick left in the remaining two. Yessir, and we're still in the race. Well, George, if you can't get the money for us we'll have to try to do without."

He rose to go.

"There's one place I didn't try, because I know you're better acquainted there than I am, and that's the Chicago crowd— Loomis's outfit, you know. They've got plenty of money, of course, and I happen to know that they've still got confidence in the camp because they're buying and paying cash for claims; paid Ada Adair twenty thousand for a bunch of options that she'd got for a song.

"The owners had abandoned them but she was miner enough to see that the rock was good and nailed the options. Then she took her samples to Loomis and he bawled out his explorer for not seeing what those claims were, but he bought and paid, cash on the spot. Now if they're buying like that they're going to stay here and operate, and they ought to be willing to boost business. You know Loomis; and I should think you could get your money from him. I would have gone there myself, but I don't know Loomis as well as you do."

"I'm glad you didn't go," said Gaston hastily. "Glad you spoke of it, George, but don't go there for the present, at least. I—will think it over."

He stepped out into the street in something of a daze. Though he had laughed in Hollenbeck's office the blow which the lawyer's disclosure had dealt him had left him weak and weary. The fight was getting too heavy; the game too crooked to play according to the rules. Only one thing prevented him from throwing his hand up, and playing according to the rules desired by Tom Pine. He wondered if Ethel would insist on "business rules" if she knew the truth of the situation.

HE STARTED gloomily down the snow-covered walk. Dusk was falling but Gaston was too discouraged to hurry back to camp. He was glad that Hollenbeck had not gone to see Loomis. It was out of the question to seek or accept help there; he was too much indebted to Loomis, things being as they were. No; Loomis would be willing all right, but a fellow couldn't borrow from the man who might. . . .

"Well! Are you going to walk right over me?"

He threw up his head and stepped aside in a flurry.

"Oh!" he said, when he saw Ada Adair. "I—beg pardon; I didn't see."

"I should say you didn't," she responded laughingly. "You were coming along there like you were going to walk right over anything that happened to be in your way and never stop to notice who or what it was."

"I—I beg pardon," repeated the young man aimlessly.

"Say!" She was looking steadily at his eyes. "What's the matter? That fire at the mill never put that look in your eyes."

"What look?" he asked.

"Well—" she studied his expression a moment longer—"you look as if you'd opened your last grub-cache and found the wolves had beat you to it."

"That's about the size of it, too."

"Good Lord!" For a moment she was flustered herself. "What you need is a good big shot of hooch and some steak," she resumed determinedly. "Come with me this minute. It's ghastly to see you with a licked look on your face."

She led the way into the Tea-Room restaurant and he followed. There, while they dined, her sharp questions soon brought out the whole story. She threw back her head and laughed when she had heard it all.

"Is that all? Why, I was afraid it was something serious. Good Lord! What's a little thing like fifteen thousand!"

She opened the money belt about her waist and drew out a carefully folded paper.

"There you are," she laughed, tossing it over the table to him. "Take it all; pay me when you good and please."

The paper fell on his folded hands. He opened it, scanned it, folded it and returned it to her. It was a certified check for twenty thousand dollars. His action puzzled her for a moment.

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"Oh, I see," she said, thinking she understood, "you have to have my endorsement, of course. Where's a pen?"

"I can't take it," said Gaston Olaf quietly.

Ada looked at him for a full minute before she spoke.

"You—can't—take—it?"

"No. I appreciate your offer. You're too generous. But—I can't accept."

Another painful pause. She slid one hand over the other nervously.

"You mean—because of my roping you—that night?"

"No! You squared that up. I understood, too."

She had drawn back until now she sat far back from the table, staring at him in a way that was painful to see. Now she leaned forward suddenly with the movement of something wild, and, her breasts pressing the table, whispered:

"Why—then? Why can't you take it?"

"Because it wouldn't be square."

"Why? Tell me why it wouldn't be square. You'd take it from a pal in pants quick enough, wouldn't you? Forget that I'm a woman——"

She stopped at the dry smile that touched one corner of his lips.

"Forget that you're a woman?" he said. "Can you forget that I'm a man?"

"I'm just offering a stake to a pal," she retorted, but the heaving of her bosom was confession that she lied. "Well, what if I can't forget that you're a man, and that I'm a woman; what has that got to do with a business proposition? You want to borrow money; I've got it lying idle. I make the loan as an investment. Now can you take it?"

He shook his head slowly as he arose.

"If I felt it was acting white I'd take it in a minute, because you've offered it in such a big way," he said, "but I don't feel that way about it. I'm grateful; I'll never forget it; but I can't accept."

"Will you tell me why?" she said in a subdued tone.

He made no reply.

"Yes."

She was studying his eyes.

"It's that snip—I mean Miss Drake." Suddenly she threw herself back in her chair and laughed recklessly. "Oh, what a fish I am! Trying to stake a man, with coin that I could have a good time on. Well, no more of it. Run along, Mr. Thorson; we're through. You can't use my check, eh? Well, I can. The game's running big out at Manchester Jimmy's—running high,wide and crooked for Bradley's boss bad men. I'll start there, and I'll celebrate till this twenty thousand is gone."

"You won't do anything so foolish as that. That's a tenderfoot's play; you won't do that."

"Won't I?" she said, smiling strangely. "Won't I! Do you know any reason why I shouldn't?"

"Yes. You're too level-headed. You're going to be a fine, big-hearted woman when you settle down, and you're not going to make any mistakes now."

"Settle down!" She laughed bitterly. "Settle down—after this? Go away, man; you make me laugh."

Her mood changed, and her smile became taunting.

"And you're the man who's trying to buck Bradley! Ha! Can't you just see Bradley letting a little chit of a girl keep him from getting what he wants? Can't you see him letting silly, kid notions keep him from getting the coin he needs? No? Neither can I. I should say not. Bradley's a skookum-man. He does things when he needs 'em done.

"The whole camp knows he's behind your mill fire, and you know it; and simply because you haven't got any proof you take it—without a come-back. You take it like a lamb. Go and burn one of his shaft-houses and see what he'd do to you. He'd turn the other cheek—not. They sell heavy socks up at the Jew's, Mr. Thorson. Hadn't you better buy half a dozen pairs for those cold feet of yours?"

Now it was Gaston's turn to laugh, and he did it cheerfully.

"Oh, so that's what you think, is it?" he said good-naturedly. "Well, you'll change your song if you stick around this camp much longer."

"One night more in Wolverene for me," she retorted. "It's too dead. One big night out at Manchester Jimmy's, and then Wolverene, good-by!"

The graveness of his expression as he stood looking at her in silence caused her to cry out impatiently:

"Oh, shake hands and run along. Don't let's have any agony. I'm game; I can take my medicine without squealing. Shake hands?"

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"Yes—if you'll promise to give up that crazy notion of going out to Jimmy's."

"Oh!" Her chin went up. "Going to play the reformer, are you? The church is farther up the street."

"Are you determined to go out there?" he asked.

The look she gave him was reply enough and he went out without another word.

It was dark night now, and Gaston stood in the snow-covered street with a tumult of emotions disturbing him. New experiences were tumbling in upon him with stunning rapidity. And she was beautiful when she flared up in anger.

He shrugged his shoulders and started for his horse. Time to be getting back to camp; Tom and MacLean would be wondering about him. That was his job—go back to camp, make saw-logs, and forget about women—forget about them all. He buttoned his coat and started for the livery stable with a grim set to his jaws. What did he have to do with her? What concern of his was her present mood. He would forget her, forget them all—completely.

Five minutes after having made this irrevocable resolution Gaston Olaf was leaning against the cigar stand in the well-lighted hotel lobby, lighting with considerable unnecessary detail and waste of time a large, brown cigar. He had come into the hotel solely and entirely to purchase that cigar, he told himself. The fact that the cigar boy was a steerer for Manchester Jimmy's, he avowed to himself, had nothing to do with his dallying.

"Smoke all right, Mr. Thorson?" said the clerk. "Ought to be good. Fresh stock. Sent five hundred of 'em out to Jimmy's yesterday, and you know he don't handle no trash."

"Mm. It's all right." Gaston carefully puffed the weed. "Jimmy's buying in big lots, eh?"

The clerk cast right and left the cautious glances with which a steerer inevitably precedes the most commonplace statement.

"Sa-a-ay! Is he? Well!"

"Eh-yah?" said Gaston with a questioning look.

"You bet! Why, say; they had to start another faro lay-out and put in two more stud tables to take care of the business. And talk about rolling 'em high! Say, some of that crowd out there must be made of money."

"Is there a crowd out there?" asked Gaston carelessly.

"Oh, sure. Regular hang-out for a bunch of the newcomers—you know the ones I mean. A lot of 'em are boarding there. You ought to have seen it last night. Wow! The fizz certainly was pouring."

"So? Sort of a live bunch, is it?"

"Live? *Live!* Believe me, and then some. Two of 'em went to the hospital down at Pottsville this morning."

"What's the matter with 'em; have the snakes?"

"Snakes nothing. Some stew got careless with his gun and these two guys stopped a couple thirty-eights apiece. But the game—say, you ought to go out and get yours in the stud-game, Mr. Thorson; they're crazy with money, and they can't touch your game at all."

"Thanks," laughed Gaston, "but I'm not playing at present."

"Sure; I ought to take a kick at myself, but when I get to capping I forget things. You wouldn't want to go out while that gang's there. Sure; I forgot." The youth leaned over confidentially. "I get paid for capping, but the fact is, Mr. Thorson, I couldn't go out there myself until that gang clears out."

"Why?"

"Too tough. Abso-bloody-lutely too tough!"

Gaston went straight back to the Tea Room, but Miss Adair was not there; she had gone up to the Empire Music-Hall.

"No, she ain't here," grinned the ticket-taker at the latter place. "She don't sing no more, you know. She just come up and took the boss and his wife and a couple of other friends away. Going to have a little party, I guess."

"Did you hear where they were going?" asked Gaston.

"Sure," said the man, "out to Manchester Jimmy's."

XIII

THE FIRST thing that Gaston saw as he emerged from the entrance of the Empire was the short, broad back of Tom Pine. The young man promptly drew back out of sight. What in the world was Tom doing in town? Cautiously he peered out again. Tom was

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hurrying down the street, toe over toe in his woodsman's lope, his head turning anxiously from left to right as he walked, and going straight for George Hollenbeck's office. Thorson understood. It was in the tenseness of his old partner's step, in the nervousness of his movements.

The old "Indian feeling" had come upon Tom in camp; he had grown worried about Gaston and had come to town to seek him. So well did Gaston know his partner that he read this as plainly as if it had been print. He waited until Tom disappeared in Hollenbeck's office, then he disappeared from the Empire's glare of light and the darkness swallowed him up. He stood in the shadow of a building for a moment and pondered.

If he went back to the stable after his horse he would get out to Jimmy's in half the time he would on foot. But Tom would soon be on the trail of the horse, and for the old woodsman to follow the tracks even on a dark night would be play. He couldn't permit that. This wasn't Tom's affair; he wasn't in any way involved and he mustn't be mixed up in it at all.

The town marshal come strolling down the street and Gaston promptly emerged from his hiding place.

"You haven't seen my pardner, Tom Pine, have you?" he called.

"Not this evening," replied the officer.

"If you do see him tell him I've gone out to look at what's left of the mill, will you?" said Thorson. "Thanks."

He went leisurely out of town in the direction that led to the mill. At the edge of the timber, where the rays of the town lights did not reach, sleighs bearing his men from camp to town passed him, and he abruptly left the road and circled to the eastward. "The boys have broken loose," but he had no time to halt them.

Presently he came to another road. He stopped and struck a match and by the tiny light examined the road-bed. A team of small-hoofed drivers drawing a light double sleigh at a galloping pace had passed but recently, going away from town and he quickly blew out his match and started on a lope after the sleigh.

Long before the lights of Manchester Jimmy's burst upon his sight he had evidence that the night at the road-house was to be a gala one. Scraps of bellowed song, bursts of wild laughter, and the shouts of strong, inflamed lungs split the still night from a distance of half a mile. An angry wolf howled from somewhere and a man answered him, and the animal's howl was the less savage of the two.

When he came to the clearing about the road-house he stopped. It was a cold night, but the doors of the place were open. Furthermore, there was not a pane of glass left in any of the windows, and what went on within was audible and visible to any one outside.

"They've run all over Jimmy and his game arm," mused Gaston as he stood scrutinizing the house of Bedlam. "He'd never let his quiet little place roar like this if he had control."

The viking blood in him leaped at the scene, but he held himself in and slipped behind a tree to listen. Presently he heard what he was waiting for, the full-throated, reckless laughter of Ada Adair. A piano broke out into a mad thrumming, and in a moment her voice was raised mockingly in a song of the woods:

Oh, I was a gay young river-man,
Jack Dalton was my name;
And I tell you now, so 'twill warn you boys
The story of my shame.
I left a comrade drowning, boys
While I made for the shore,
And now I'm a disgraced river-man
And I can't live any more.

A burlesque sob. Then the chorus:

Oh, dive at the foot of the rapids, boys,
Down where the water's deep.
There's where you'll find me rolling, boys,
Safe in my long, long sleep.

Thorson was at the nearest window by this time. Ada was standing upon the platform by the piano, her back toward the window, looking down at as choice a collection of drunken thugs as ever made night hideous. There was something sinister and unclean, even about the applause with which they greeted her.

"'At's the girl; go to it!"

Gaston gripped hard at the window sill.

"Go to it!" they growled. "Give us 'nother song."

She looked at them without replying for a long time, and as the room grew still Gaston sensed the change that was coming over her. And then it came:

"You dirty, sneaking curs!" Her voice snapped out like the crack of a lash. "Do you think I'd sing for you? Do you think

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I'm one of your kind? You dogs! You think you're bad men; you're hired to get one man, and you're afraid to go out to his camp and get him, because he's a *man!* Do you get that—he's a man, and you're nothing but a lot of hired dogs—Bradley's curs, that's what you are—and the worst you dare do is to burn a mill at night."

There was a moment of astounded silence.

"Can that stuff, sister," said a voice ominously.

Ada turned like a flash in the direction of the speaker.

"Sister—to you? Do you see any yellow streak about me?"

"Cut that out!" The gangsters were finding their tongues. "Your skirts ain't going to save you here."

She laughed, laughed in their faces with a scorn and contempt which even they could feel, as they moved toward her.

"Throw her out!"

They reached for her and Gaston vaulted through the window. His first blow dropped in a heap the man who had caught her by the wrist. The second flung another man like a bag of meal in the midst of his fellows. They rushed, and he met them, the heavy piano stool as his weapon. For a moment his strength and fury halted them, and he laid about him like a madman, clearing a space about the platform. There was a pause, the dumfounded gangsters glaring at the man who faced them with the remnant of the stool, a splintered leg, in his hand; then a shout went up as they recognized him.

"The guy we're after! Get him; bump him off right here!"

Gaston glanced toward the window. The way of retreat was cut off by a dozen men. The staggering gunmen were tugging drunkenly at their hidden holsters.

"This way—quick!" called Ada Adair.

She was half-way up the flimsy stairway that led to Jimmy's living quarters on the floor above.

"Quick! For God's sake!"

It was life or death, for her as well as him, and he sprang to her side. A shot snapped viciously down below, and he felt something hot pierce his left arm.

"Quick!"

She was up the stairs holding ready the heavy trap-door which Jimmy had thoughtfully provided for his own safety in emergencies. Gaston hurled his weapon into the face of a man with a pistol in his hand, leaped after her, slammed the trap-door shut, and slid the heavy bars into place.

Neither spoke a word for a long time. In the darkness he could feel her near him, but he did not move or speak. Her first words came in a low, trembling voice, different from her tones of a moment ago:

"You're hit. I heard it land. Where——"

"In the left arm," he replied. "Get back."

A VOLLEY of shots roared down below, but Jimmy was experienced and had builded well, and the revolver bullets did not penetrate the thick planks.

"Hm. That's good, at least," he said. "They haven't got rifles, so they can't get us that way. There's a window; keep away from that."

Then silence again, save for their loud breathing, in the Stygian darkness.

"You've got to look at your arm," she whispered presently. "That bullet might have cut an artery."

He pondered a moment before replying. "That's sense."

He slipped off his mackinaw in the dark, rolled up his shirt-sleeve and struck a match. In the great rope-like muscle of the forearm above the wrist there was a small, blue hole from which protruded threads from the blue flannel of the shirt.

"A thirty-two," he said. "No artery. Huh! Funny; the arm feels as dead as a piece of wood. The lead's in there, up near the elbow, I guess."

The match went out.

"Light another," she said. "There's a lantern on the beam above your head. Light it."

He obeyed and without looking at him she began to pick the cloth-strands from his wound. When it was clean she produced a dainty silk handkerchief and rolled it about the arm in a neat bandage, dexterously fastening it with a pin from her coat. And then, by the light of the lantern, they looked at one another.

"Well," he said, "you got the excitement you were looking for, didn't you?"

A succession of heavy blows thundered against the trap-door, but her eyes did not waver.

"By the eternal pines!" he cried. "You're game—as game as they make 'em."

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"I want to know," she said, paying no attention to his outburst, "why you came here?"

The blows on the trap-door were repeated. to the accompaniment of a babel of curses.

"There's the answer," he said. "I heard there was that kind of a crowd out here."

"And you came out—just for some excitement?"

"You know why I came out," he replied.

"I want to hear you say it!" she whispered with heaving bosom.

The danger they had passed through, the danger they were in meant nothing to her. Only that moment counted. His words, whatever they might be, meant everything.

"You thought something of me, then—you thought enough—to come on my account?"

"Yes."

Unconsciously she had drawn nearer to him.

"Tell me—you cared enough for me—to risk your life for me?" Her hands were on his shoulders, and her eyes were tender with tears.

"Yes."

"Kiss me—just once."

She held up her face and their lips met, clung a moment and parted. In that kiss she learned what the future did and did not hold for her, yet when she drew back from him there was a new calmness in her expression; her eyes held a certain light of triumph.

"I had to know," she confessed, "that's why I came out. If you hadn't come—I wouldn't have cared what happened down there. But you did come! Ah, you did come!"

She clasped her hands on her breast and laughed, as more shots struck the trap-door.

"Shoot, you curs! Do your worst—My boy cared enough to save me from myself!"

"We're not safe yet." Gaston had detected a new note in the brawling and bent down to listen. "They're bringing in a log for a battering-ram."

There was a sound of scuffling in the room below. Manchester Jimmy's crisp voice rang out:

"I tell you, boys, you've done enough. You take that log outside."

"Knock him down. Throw him out. Don't pull that gun, Jimmy."

"I'm not going to pull any gun." Jimmy was talking for time, striving to delay action until the spirit of the gang might become less murderous. "There's been too much of that done already. Blow me if you haven't gone too far this time, lads. There'll be officers here in the morning. The gent who owns the Empire slipped out and drove for town. He'll spread the story. This sort of thing isn't done here, y'know. Let it drop where it is or we're all in the soup."

"Out o' the way, Jimmy."

Jimmy laughed.

"Go ahead, boys. But let me save you the trouble; they've beat you out of your fun, Thorson and the girl. They climbed out of the window and dropped to the ground about five minutes ago, and by this time they're probably half a mile in the timber."

"Good lie, Jimmy; but we're on; we've got the window watched. Out of the way!"

Gaston straightened up with a smile on his lips.

"Well, it's coming. Get back in the corner. Give me room to kick their heads off when the door gives."

He blew out the lantern and made ready. There was a scuffling on the stairway, then the log, swung by many hands, thudded against the planks. The bars creaked but held.

"Harder, you bums!" laughed Gaston Olaf. "Swing it like men."

Again the log smashed against the door. The planks lifted under the force of the blow. Still the bars held. Thud, thud, thud! A bar broke with a snap and one end of the door raised slightly.

"Once more, now! Heave her!" bellowed the men below. "One, two—what's that?"

The woods about the clearing had exploded with one colossal yell. And above the yell, and piercing the wildest shouts, rang the voice of Tom Pine:

"Come on, boys! Give 'em —— !"

Gaston sprang to the window and looked out. Sleighs were pouring into the clearing, men were tumbling out of the sleighs and crashing into the road-house through windows and doors.

"Go to it, shanty-boys!" shrieked a maddened MacLean. "Clean 'em up!"

And the shanty-boys roared and obeyed orders.

"*Ee-yow*, shanty-boys!" cried Gaston, his mouth to the crack. "Eat 'em alive!"

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"Ee-yow!" They roared back, and smashed into their foes.

Devastating gun-fire might have stopped that rush, but that only, and the sodden gunmen were too slow in drawing their guns. In physical combat they stood no show with the hardened woodsmen. And the men from camp were mad. The long pent-up lust for battle with these opponents was venting itself.

Ere the gangsters fully realized what was happening they had been swept off their feet, knocked down, kicked down, grappled with, outfought. After that, once the lumberjacks had gained the upper hand, the battle became chastisement. Gaston threw up the trap-door and sat down on the top step to view the turmoil below.

"Knock down and drag out, shanty-boys!" he cheered. "Break 'em, break their nerve!"

"Knock down and drag out!" yelped back the maddened lumberjacks.

In ten minutes the fight was over. Most of the gangsters had escaped into the woods. The others were disarmed and helpless.

"Make 'em all travel," laughed Gaston.

"Travel, bums!" commanded the lumberjacks, and kicked their prisoners out of the house, across the clearing, and into the black night.

Then Tom Pine squinted up at Gaston Olaf through a pair of rapidly closing eyes.

"How in ——, boy," said he quizzically, "did you come to be up there?"

XXIV

THE old man stared apprehensively as his partner followed Ada Adair down the stairs.

"You're hit in the arm, eh, boy?" he queried anxiously. "Is that all?"

"That's all. Isn't that enough?"

Tom shook his head, looking about nervously.

"The Indian feeling is still on me, Gaston Olaf," he said. "It's been on me all day, and it ain't satisfied yet. I woke up with it this morning, boy; and when I see you start for town to see George Hollenbeck about that money it began to grow. I knew something was going to happen, something black and tough, jest as I know when the weather's going to change by the touch of my rheumatiz. 'By cripes! I can't stand it any longer,' I said to Sandy, and off I hiked to town after you. I'd been talking that way all day, and I'd got the boys going, so they up and grabbed the horses and followed me, though I didn't know anything about that at the time.

"Well, when I got your trail in town—got to the ticket man at the Empire fifteen minutes after you'd left—and when I heard what he'd told you, and then what you'd told the marshal, I was certain that right here's where you'd be. Jest then the boys came driving into town, and it was a case of turn around and jump the horses all the way out here, and here we are." His voice trailed off into a faint whisper and he looked around apprehensively and shivered. "But some more war-medicine is being cooked against us somewhere, boy; something black and tough is going to happen."

Manchester Jimmy, his eyes well blacked, his features a series of cuts and bruises, but his hair still neatly slicked in place, was looking intently at Gaston's wounded arm.

"Can you bend it, sir?" he said suddenly.

"No," replied Gaston, puzzled, "it's as dead as a stick."

The arm, half crooked, was hanging at his side like a dead weight.

"Ah, ha! There's your tough thing that was going to happen, Mr. Pine." Jimmy's stubby fingers began a swift exploration of the arm. "'Tis drawing up on you, sir?"

It was true; the crook of the arm was growing.

"You've got to get to the doctor at once, Mr. Thorson," said Jimmy swiftly.

"I know." He thrust out his own crooked and withered arm. "That's just how I got that. At Dawson it was. The fool doctor said, leave the bullet in if it wasn't hurting; and the bullet up on the joint all the time, and my arm drawing up even then. Afterward I learned that the lead should have come out right away. Don't delay, sir; I'll have my man drive you to the hospital at Pottsville at once."

"At once is right," said Tom Pine. He looked around uncertainly. "I don't feel right yet. That arm is bad enough, I guess; but that ain't it. Something is going to happen."

Manchester Jimmy waved his hand toward his barn where the lumber-jacks were swarming like bees around honey.

"When your men get about four drinks apiece something will happen, sure enough."

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

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"The devil himself couldn't stop 'em from hitting it up now," said he. "But that ain't it. It's something—something else. Gaston Olaf, you take Jimmy's advice and hike for the hospital. You're going to need both your arms, and you know it. I'll stay with the boys and try to get 'em back to camp without their going in and burning Wolverene."

Ada Adair moved past to leave the room.

"Go, as Jimmy tells you," she said before he could utter a word. "So long, and good luck!"

AT THE crude hospital in Pottsville the boyish doctor was inexperienced in gunshot wounds and loath to probe. Only on Gaston's insistence did he become convinced of the necessity for operation. Then he got his instruments ready, took a long drink of whisky and—confessed that the job was beyond him. But there was a more experienced surgeon down at Elk City, and thither Gaston and the young doctor drove as rapidly as fresh horses could take them.

"Bad," said the Elk City man promptly, and, using the hypodermic liberally, cut the bullet out at the elbow. "Greased bullet dirty. This will take watching."

Followed several days then when Gaston lay filled to the neck with opiates while the doctor syringed, and drained, and fought infection in as dangerous a bullet-hole as he had ever seen. On the day that the drain was taken out the doctor said—

"We've licked it."

Tom Pine appeared then, wearing an expression which prepared Gaston for the worst possible news.

"Well, I hear they saved the arm for you, boy," he said, seating himself and rubbing his knees slowly.

"Yes; they saved the arm."

"Good thing. Good thing something's saved. "You see they—they burnt the camp on us, boy. I knew something was going to happen Saturday. It did. Bradley don't sleep at all. He must have heard right away about the crew and all of us being away, out at Jimmy's, and he must have got busy pretty quick.

"You see there was only half a dozen of the old fellows left at camp, and they went to bed early. The fire woke 'em up. There was dynamite, too. Some of the horses got out of the stables; some didn't. The men all got out. But everything went, boy, stable, bunk-house, tools, cook-shack, grub-cache, everything. They—well, they put us out of business, Gaston Olaf, and that's all there is to it."

The two partners sat looking at one another through a long silence, Tom resuming the idle rubbing of his knees. Gaston looked up at the ceiling.

"Bradley doesn't sleep; you're right, Tom."

"No; he doesn't sleep. And I see him walking the streets of Wolverene next day, Gaston Olaf, just as if he didn't know anything about it; and I said to myself, 'Hold on; the boy said shooting didn't go;' so I turned my back and come away.

"It was all my fault, of course," the old fellow went on sadly. "If I'd kept my mouth shut in camp on Sat'day the boys wouldn't have got the idea that something was coming up, and they'd stayed in camp. Most of 'em, anyway. Then there'd been a chance to save the outfit maybe."

"Yes. And then you wouldn't have been there to save me out at Jimmy's."

"Thanks, Gaston Olaf; those words help considerable. You don't blame me then?"

"Blame you! You old fool! Which d'you suppose I'd rather have, the camp or my life?"

Tom straightened his back at that.

"You figger it that way, eh? I was afraid you'd say you could have took care of yourself and my job was to take care of camp."

"I couldn't take care of myself out there; they had me in a hole, and I'd never have got out alive but for you—and the boys. By ——! It's a shame; the boys saved my life, and now they're out of work and no money to pay their wages. That's tough on them."

Tom Pine squirmed uneasily, but he made no response.

"And we'll have no chance of getting any money for 'em, either, because the payments are due on the leases, and Bradley'll buy up the land and throw us off."

"No-o-o," drawled Tom softly, "he won't do that."

"Why? He doesn't sleep; he won't overlook a bet like that."

"He certainly wouldn't; you're right there, boy. Fact is, I know he's been after the guys we're leasing from. But he can't get at us from that angle, not just now,

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anyway. No, sir-ee. Because the lease money is paid."

Gaston turned his head and scrutinized his partner carefully.

"Who paid it?" he demanded.

"I did. With real money."

"You raised a loan somewhere?"

"I raised a loan."

"Where?"

"I got fifteen thousand dollars. So I paid the lease money, and I paid the boys what wages they needed. And I got the money from the gamest, whitest guy in camp—or used to be in camp."

"Who?"

Tom Pine gave Gaston back look for look.

"From Miss Ada Adair, and don't you go bawling me out, boy. I took it on my own responsibility. I'm getting old, and there won't be many more chances like this for me, and I wasn't going to lose it, not with as true-blue a pal as that standing up and offering me the loan of her money. I'm old, yes, and I've seen a lot, and I know how —— little a lot of things count in the long run. She told me how Bradley had tried to make up to her, and how she wanted to see him licked.

"She told me a lot of other things, too, but you know 'em, so I ain't saying a word about 'em. She said, and it's the truth, that there wasn't another dollar in camp that we could get, and that if we didn't take it Bradley had us done for; and so I put on my cap and walked around the street, and came back and asked her respectful-like did she have about fifteen thousand dollars to loan Thorson & Pine at six per cent. And then we went over and had Hollenbeck draw the papers; and there you are.

"Now I don't care a ——, Gaston Olaf, how you r'ar up and cuss at me, because the thing is done now, and the leases safe for another six months, and the boys paid. We can't log any more this Winter on account of no grub, but we've paid the boys and kept our timber. Well, ain't you going to cuss a little? Ain't you going to take the hide off your old partner's back?"

But Gaston only stared at him and muttered:

"You old son-of-a-gun!"

"There's hell and all to settle with yet," continued Tom, "because Bradley will go crazy now, and you know that means only one thing—for you. Now here's the way to fix that, boy. I go back to Wolverene and I get a little edge on. I talk high, wide and handsome about Bradley and what I'm going to do to him when I catch him.

"Then I manage to meet him right in the lobby of the hotel, with his watch-dogs and all. Won't be hard to start things then, and you know me, boy; I'm too quick for any of those city bad-men, and in the scrap Mr. Bradley would be sure to stop some lead."

"Stop that," commanded Gaston. "We've talked that over before, and what I said then still goes."

"But, Judas Priest, boy! We're done for; we're licked. And this man is going to finish us up if we let him go along without being stopped. His next move will be to get *you!*"

"Wait," was Gaston's response. "You keep away from town."

Tom rose in anger.

"All right. I'll go out in the bush and pray for Mr. Bradley's welfare. But I'll be —— if I stay here wasting time on a softy."

He fumbled in his mackinaw.

"Here's a letter for you."

The letter was from Ada Adair, a few scant lines which read:

> I said, so-long, last Saturday night, but I've been thinking things over since then, and now I know for the good of both of us it's got to be—good-by.

"She's gone out?" asked Gaston.

"Yep. Gone for good. And she didn't leave any address, except with George Hollenbeck, who's handling our loan for her; and she swore him on the Bible never to tell a soul. Game—game and white, that girl, boy. And you—you sit there and you don't even cuss once when you hear how Bradley's cleaned us!

"Mebbe you'd better go south when this medicine-man says you can travel. Because if you go north you'll get to Wolverene, and Bradley's at Wolverene, and he's out to get you the next time you and him meet up. Well, what do you say?—Good God! He jest sets there and smiles like a darned picture. Oh, mercy! How nice and *good!*"

The young man laughed heartily as Tom Pine flung himself indignantly out of the door. But the laugh soon died out and he sat staring disconsolately at the floor.

Bradley had won. Despite the fact that money had been found to pay the lease rents, Gaston held no false ideas on that subject. The destruction of the mill might

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have been weathered if the camp had been permitted to run at full speed through the logging season. Now the camp was gone, the crew was dispersed. There could be no more logging thought of until a new crew had been gathered, new horses, sleighs, tools and food acquired, tasks which the firm of Thorson & Pine was in no position to accomplish.

True, there was much timber on the ice, waiting to go down the creek at the coming of open water, and logs were as good as money. A small new mill might be obtained on credit and the logs sawed into lumber during the Summer. Yes, and Bradley—what would he be doing in the meantime?

Thorson's chin sank down upon his breast as the sense of defeat oppressed him. Tom and he might hang on to their timber rights, might return grimly to their burnt camp and resume the task of rebuilding, but what was the use. Bradley would be there fighting them, and he was too strong. He had proved it. Through his power the milling and logging had been stopped for this season; it was not unlikely that next season he would be weaker, and Gaston knew the man never would be less revengeful. Old Crowley was right; a man with empty hands can't fight money. Bradley had the money.

"Come in!" called Gaston in response to a knock and the local liveryman entered.

Had Gaston been in a less depressed mood his keen vision would have told him that this man who came smiling so obsequiously was not on a friendly mission.

"I see your partner," said the man. "He says you're 'bout cured. I reckon you'll be starting back to Wolverene soon?"

"Tomorrow morning," replied Gaston.

"Yes? Well, I reckon you'll want a rig to drive up with? I'm the only one in town who's got rigs to hire, you know?"

Gaston laughed shortly.

"So that's what you're after—the job of driving me north, eh? Why, man, don't you know that my driving days are over? It costs money to ride, so I'm going to walk unless I can catch a ride free."

The liveryman apparently had not considered such a contingency, and he stared like an actor who has forgotten his lines.

"Going to walk? Huh! That's a terrible hike, and there ain't any sleighs on the road nowadays. You better let me drive you up?"

"No."

The man hesitated in his departure.

"You got to leave mighty early in the morning to make that hike," he suggested.

"Before daylight," agreed Gaston, and the liveryman went out and quietly despatched a boy to Wolverene. The boy bore a note to Bradley.

XXV

A BITTER gray dawn greeted Gaston next morning, and he sang in the teeth of it as he set forth. Dun mountains of clouds rolled over the heavens from the north, threatening rain, snow, or storm. A playful wind whined level with earth, whipping dry points of snow like pins against a traveler's face. And he laughed, as he swung his head against it, and sang.

Dark and fierce as the morn was, it was no darker or fiercer than the spirit which now was free in the young man's soul. He had kept it imprisoned while Tom Pine told the short, bitter tale of the camp's burning; he had kept it in curb even a few minutes before as the doctor, manipulating the wounded arm and finding his work good, had pronounced any man walking to Wolverene on such a day a condemned fool. But now, out of the sight of man, in the grip of the darkling elements, his blandness vanished, and the song, that laugh he hurled into the rising wind, had in it the very essence of fury and despair.

"Crippled and licked; crippled and licked! And the man who did it is at Wolverene; so there's only one thing to do."

He had made his resolve the moment he heard Tom Pine's report. Rather, his nature had made it for him; for being what he was, having lived the life he had, there was only one thing that he could do. Oh, he thought of the "rules," too, and of Ethel's protest against his harshness; but the natural part of him, the part that rules a man in time of crisis, overwhelmed such thoughts. He had one thing to do.

The battle-soul of him commanded him as thoroughly, as unreasoningly as ever it had commanded his viking ancestors to hurl themselves on a foe's spears; and as he marched on the way to do it his step grew light, his body seemed tireless, and to his spirit came the snatches of weird melody which always came at the imminence of desperate trouble.

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Courage? He would have scorned the suggestion; what courage in the bridegroom rushing to his bride? And so Gaston Thorson fared toward Wolverene; and by noon the storm had blown the clouds out of the heavens; the sun was shining; and by three, where the road ran through a clump of jack-pine, the liveryman's note brought results.

Thorson was hurrying on at a lope, toe over toe, when a horse neighed in the timber, and he stopped. Bradley appeared almost instantly, stepping out of the brush directly before Gaston, and his coat was off and his head bare. Then Gaston shed his mackinaw and cap in a flash, and like two bears they drew toward one another silently. No waste of futile words, of angry curses. No insane rush, no primitive display of the instinct to rush and crush, no waste effort. Two masters were about to play at the Great Game, the world-old game, which is to all other games what life is to stage play.

"With my bare hands, Thorson," said Bradley softly. "I saved this job for myself. I'm going to break you; I'm going to wreck you; and I'm going to kick you out of camp for good."

He struck with a quickness that was like the flash of a gun, too quickly for Gaston to guard. The blow went home on the right cheek-bone, and for an instant the victim thought he had been shot. Then he saw that the gleam of metal came from the brass knuckles on Bradley's fist, and understood the shock that had numbed him to his heels.

"Bare hands, eh?" he growled. "Yes; that's your style, all right."

His counter went solidly home; but Bradley merely rolled his head and struck again. Gaston ducked, but the hard knuckles fell full on his forehead. For the first time in his life he felt the sagging at the knees which takes the heart out of a beaten fighter. He retreated, guarding and feinting until his senses cleared, then leading desperately for the jaw. A second later he was picking himself up from the farther side of the road. Bradley had beaten him to the blow, knocking him fairly off his feet. He arose and circled cautiously.

Either Bradley was the better boxer or the two first blows had taken the speed from Gaston's arms. He contented himself with circling and guarding. Bradley followed coolly, scientifically trying blow after blow but unable to drive one through the guard.

Gaston tried for a clinch but a vicious uppercut straightened him up. He feinted and guarded for a while, and to measure his speed with his rival's tried another lead and was knocked down once more. Bradley was the better boxer; he was quicker; he struck harder. Gaston knew now that the battle had resolved itself into one of endurance and grimly he set himself to hang on. One fact buoyed him up as he took his punishment; Bradley was wearing knuckles. A man didn't do that unless he was afraid.

"With your bare hands, eh, Bradley?" he mocked. "The streak in you showed there; you had to come fixed."

"With my bare hands," repeated Bradley, "with a little brass to keep from touching your hide."

"There's a little streak of yellow in you, isn't there, Bradley. You wanted to make it man to man, but you didn't quite have the nerve. You know man to man I'm a better man than you."

"I want to decorate you," sneered Bradley. "Want to change your face, so you won't butt in with ladies who're above you."

He feinted, rushed and struck, and Gaston gripped his head in chancery. Bradley laughed and tore himself free with ease.

"That was my game arm, Bradley," said Gaston. "Try the other."

A gleam shot through the cold hate in Bradley's eyes. His blows now began to aim at the wounded forearm. One, two, three, and the arm's numbness from the armored fists warned Gaston of his danger. He dropped his guard and swung his right like a flail, fighting so furiously that Bradley had no time for aught but guarding.

"I'll cut you down by degrees," said Bradley, evading the rush. "First this arm; then the other. And then I'll put you out of business."

"Man-talk, Bradley."

The left arm began to falter.

"Hah! Beginning to weaken a little, eh? Whine, —— you, why don't you whine?" The arm drooped lower. In Bradley's cold eyes there came the look of the wolf which sees the ham-strung moose falter. He moved closer. Like a flash Gaston's left arm snapped forward, and Bradley fell and was up as he touched the snow.

"How'd you like it, Bradley?" Gaston smiled, but the smile was all bluff.

That effort had completed the work

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begun by Bradley's brass knuckles, and the arm which he held out so threateningly was little more than dead weight. One chance for victory, he thought swiftly; if Bradley's rage at the knock-down would prompt him to a mad rush there was a possibility of a knock-out with the right. But Bradley did not rush. Steadily and relentlessly he resumed the wearing-down process, cautiously pounding away at the arm which had felled him, coolly avoiding Gaston's blows.

The pounding told. Strive as he would to hide the limb's growing weakness Gaston felt the arm drooping. He threw himself into one supreme effort, rushing regardlessly, taking the brass knuckles on his face, in an attempt to land with the right. The rush was over. Bradley had not been touched. Like a wounded moose with his head to the wolf, Gaston stopped and stood still in the middle of the road, one-armed so far as fighting went.

Bradley came slowly forward, his arms working like pistons. Gaston struck, but Bradley ducked easily and came on again.

"One arm, Bradley; come on!"

Bradley rushed. A whirl of fists; Gaston felt his right go home even as the knuckles found his temples; then a flash of fog; then he realized that he was lying on his side in the snow. He looked up, rising painfully on his elbow. Bradley had gone down, but he was up again, up and ready.

The fight was Bradley's. A few more knock-downs like that. . . With the speed of instinct Gaston dropped flat on the ground. Something had split the fog before his dazed eyes. As he dropped, it fanned his face with a swish of air, it rasped the skin from his chin. Instinct alone had saved him from it; instinct now prompted him to roll away.

The motion cleared away the fog, and then he saw what it was. Bradley didn't have the nerve to wait and finish the fight with Gaston on his feet. He had wanted to play safe, to finish it before his opponent could rise to his feet. He had leaped forward to give the *coup-de-grâce* with one kick of his steel-caulked boot, and Gaston had barely cheated him of his aim. Cheated him, but only for a moment.

The terrible kick, aimed to break Gaston's neck, had carried Bradley off his balance, and he was recovering himself three or four paces away. He came forward deliberately now, measuring the distance to Gaston's head as calmly as if it had been a football, poising himself for the fatal kick; and Gaston saw the cruel mouth and eyes livid with hate and triumph. Bradley drew back his right leg and then Gaston, timing the kick perfectly, threw himself forward, locking his arms about Bradley's knees and jerking him to the ground with a thump.

"Got you, Bradley! By —— I've got you now!"

His foe was helpless for a second or two, stunned by the sudden fall on the hard ground; Gaston was clear-headed; he might have won the fight then and there with a single blow, but he did not strike. He snatched the brass knuckles from Bradley's hands, hurled them into the brush, and sprang to his feet.

"Now, Bradley, it's man to man. It's taken us a long time to get to that, but I knew we'd get there; knew it ever since the day we met. And I've got you, Bradley; the streak in you beat you, you dirty kicker. You weren't man enough to wait and do it with your fists; you had to go to it with the boots. So it's man to man at last. It's the big hour for us. Come on, you dirty camp-burner; stand up and fight for your life!"

Rage and fear drove Bradley to battle like a madman. The fight raged up and down the road. Science was thrown away; they cursed as they struck and clinched. Blow after blow Gaston took full in face, and he laughed and swung his one good arm like a machine. Blow after blow he swung, and finally one went home and Bradley dropped.

"Take your time, man; wait till your head's clear; then get up and take it some more."

"I'm licked." Bradley lolled on his hands and knees. "I'm done for."

"Oh, no, you aren't. You can take a lot more. Stand up and get it."

Thwarted in his ruse to draw Gaston within reach, Bradley sprang up. With his head down he charged and clipped Gaston about the middle, but the latter broke the hold and wrapped his arms around his foe's body. Breast to breast they stood now, straining, panting. The fog of exhaustion began to creep on to Gaston. He set his teeth tightly and hung on. He felt something give, he heard a crack, he did not know or care what. He hung on. His

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arms were like iron, though his mind was befogged. A strange ringing began to din in his ears; he seemed to hear excited voices. Ethel's voice, Ray Drake's, Loomis's—what nonsense!

"Whoa!" cried some one far away.

The ringing ceased. Gaston lifted his dulled eyes and saw that the sound had come from the bells on the stage-sleigh which had come whirling around a bend in the road. Nor were the voices a hallucination; for there in the sleigh were Drake, and Loomis, and Ethel, returning to Wolverene. Then Gaston understood how carefully Bradley had staged the affair. He put forth the last of his strength in a mighty squeeze, felt the body go limp in his arms, and fell exhausted upon his prostrate foe.

XVI

SWIFT hands caught at his shoulders to lift him and found that his arms were locked like steel bands about his opponent's chest. They reached his hands that were locked behind Bradley's back and sought in vain to pry them apart.

"Both dead, I guess," said the driver callously.

"Dead nothing," snapped Loomis. Gaston felt the fog about his mind clearing as a handful of snow was dashed into his face.

"Try some licker." The driver produced a bottle, the odor of which polluted the air when the cork was removed. "That'll make a dead man do a clog-dance."

A few drops of the burning stuff were forced against Thorson's clinched teeth and the bite of it on his lips roused him.

"Hold on! Hands off you fellows!" He did not relax his hold nor lift his head. "Bradley, are you licked? Am I best man?"

"He's out, Thorson, out cold," said Loomis. "He can't hear you."

"He looks dead to me," supplemented the driver.

"Give him a shot of that redeye; bring him to; he's got to talk to me." Gaston's mind cleared, and he broke forth in a fury. "Get out of here, you guys. Drive on. Bradley's got to say 'Enough.' "

"He's got more than enough, Thorson," said Loomis quietly. "Look at him; that man is badly hurt."

The woodsman lifted his head sufficiently to view the face of his foe. One glance was enough. He rose to his knees. He heard Ray Drake soothing Ethel and he carefully kept his back toward the sleigh.

"Give him some whisky," he said nodding at the fallen man.

Bradley made no sound as the fiery liquor trickled into his open mouth; there was no sign of returning consciousness.

"Yes, he's got enough for the present," agreed Gaston, "but a devil like him will come back."

Loomis looked at the woodsman's face and at the arm which hung helpless at his side.

"You've been damaged a little yourself, Thorson. Arm broken?"

"No; just numbed." He rose drunkenly, still keeping his back to the sleigh. "Take him with you;" he indicated Bradley, "he'll need a doctor. I'll ride his mare in—after you."

Carefully keeping his face hidden from the occupants of the sleigh he stalked into the brush where the mare was tied. He heard Loomis and the driver placing Bradley in the sleigh; and when the dying creak of runners told that they had gone out of sight he mounted the mare and set out in their tracks.

"Good Gad!" he groaned as he recalled Ethel's cries of terror. "What a thing for her to see! What a welcome on her return!"

But the strong wine of victory was running too fiercely in his veins for such thoughts to linger long with him. He had met Bradley and he had beaten him. Man to man he was "best man." And though Bradley might triumph over him in a business way, might ruin him, he knew that his was the greater joy of victory.

"He had to take it," he exulted to the big mare, "and no matter what his gunmen do to me, no matter if he does get our business, he'll never forget that."

The horse reared, impatient at the slow pace, and he quieted her with a hard hand.

"No you don't old girl; no getting in sight of that sleigh for us. She isn't going to see this face looking the way it is."

He rode slowly, entering Wolverene after dark, and Tom Pine was waiting.

"How bad are *you* hurt?" he asked apprehensively.

Gaston tumbled from the saddle without replying. His hurts had begun to take toll and he was stiff and weak.

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"I guess you know you been in a fight, too, eh? Come on, boy; this way."

Tom swiftly led the way to a room where, to Gaston's amazement, a doctor was awaiting him.

"Who told you?" he demanded weakly.

"Loomis. Said you'd need treatment. Now we'll have a look."

"I got him," muttered Gaston before giving way to stupor. "He got our mill and camp, Tom, but I got him."

Hours later, bandaged, nourished, and restored to a normal state of mind, he grinned at Tom through his bandages.

"How's Bradley?" he asked. "I can't hate the fellow, even if he was a crook and wore knuckles. No, sir, I can't; he gave me too good a fight. How is he?"

"Smashed all to ——," was the gleesome reply. "You jest naturally squeezed three ribs loose on him, boy. Then his collarbone cracked when you fell, and outside of that he ain't what you would call purty. But that ain't all—his nerve's gone."

"Huh! Don't fool yourself, Tom. When that guy loses his nerve the devil will serve ice-water."

"No, sir! No, sir-ee, boy; I tell you his nerve is gone. You broke him; you broke his bones and you broke his black heart. He whimpered when they loaded him to take him away."

"They took him away?"

"Sure. Down to the hospital. They got to put him in a plaster cast or something like that, I understand. And his nerve is gone. Yessir-ee. Gone completely. At first he said he wasn't going; told 'em to leave him alone. Then young Loomis steps over and whispers to him a few minutes. Said he was jest advising him to go. Well, sir, Bradley goes whiter than ever, they say, and his jaw begins shaking. That's the sign that a man's nerve is gone. 'Yes, yes, I'll go,' he says. 'Hurry and get a sleigh.' Now, what does that look like to you? Don't it look like you'd busted the black devil's nerve wide open?"

Gaston listened in surprise, but he knew that Bradley was too much of a fighting man to let even such a crushing beating break his nerve.

"If you see Loomis tell him I'd like to see him."

"He was asking for you," said Tom, rising. "I'll get him."

Loomis entered the room a few minutes later and as Gaston looked at him he was conscious that this young man, too, had won a recent victory.

"What did you tell Bradley that made him leave camp?" he asked.

Loomis did not reply at once.

"Well, I guess you've got a right to know," he said at last. "It's rather a long story. You see, some of the stockholders in our outfit have recently become heavy holders in the Syndicate. They invested on the recommendation of some of their friends who are in the Syndicate. These fellows recommended investing because of the reports Bradley had been making.

"Some of our crowd began to fear that they'd gone in too heavy and they ordered me to investigate. Well, I know about what the Syndicate properties around here will produce, and when I saw Bradley's reports—whew! He hasn't got any rock that will go within fifty per cent. of what he claims for it."

"Huh! What was his idea?"

"Oh, he had a peach of an idea, all right; leave that to Bradley. He has such good ideas that although the Syndicate has suspected for years that he's crooked they've never had anything to work on until now."

"Ah! I knew it; a man who wears knuckles in a fist fight is crooked all the way through."

Loomis laughed and continued:

"Those sky-high reports gave Bradley a good reason for acquiring new properties and naturally when rock is such high-grade stuff claims aren't to be bought for a low figure. Bradley bought a lot of 'em, as you know, and he bought every one of them twice. He bought first from the claim-owner for Mr. Bradley, privately and personally, for a low figure—you know how low he's got 'em for, since he began to bulldoze the camp.

"Then he bought a second time, officially, for the Syndicate, at a sky-high figure based on his own beautiful reports; and the difference between what he paid the owners and what he charged the Syndicate stuck in his own hands. It amounts to about half a million as near as we can figure."

"Ouch! That was what you told him then?"

"Yes. I'd been down to Frost Bite Landing and communicated with the Syndicate. They're going to begin action. I just gave Bradley a hint and he flitted."

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Gaston stared in surprise.

"You tipped him off? Why, he'll make his getaway, won't he?"

Loomis leaned forward, his jaw firmly set.

"The Universal Syndicate and the people who have invested in it have got more money than they'll ever need, and ninety-nine per cent. of 'em would look upon Bradley's actions as smart business, if they had profited by it. They're that kind of a crowd; you understand. I made my report, because that's my duty, but I won't play policeman for them. It's to the interests of the white people in this camp to get Bradley out of the way; so I set him going. His gang is still in camp. Nobody knows what might happen tonight if he had been here to give them orders."

"I see," said Gaston softly. "By the way, how did Miss Drake and her brother happen to be coming back to camp just then?"

"Oh, they'd been down at the Landing for two days. Bradley had ordered Ray to remain there until sent for. He sent for him this morning."

"By the eternal pines!" Thorson chuckled in his bandages. "Can't you see what he was after? In some way he'd learned that I was hiking up today. He planned to catch me and beat me up, on account of my game arm, and then the sleigh would come along and meet him kicking me out of the district."

"And instead he got kicked out himself." Loomis changed his tone. "Now, let's get down to business, Thorson. You're made now. You'll find everybody willing to do business with you on a credit basis. Banks and stores and so on. Well, when I heard that the Syndicate was going after Bradley, I knew his reign was over here, and as we're awfully short of lumber I took a liberty and sent an order south for a duplicate of your mill. Rush order.

"You can give us your note for it; but what I'm after is to get you to start sawing and delivering lumber to us as soon as possible. So you get right back in the game, and—I've got to be on my way. So long."

Gaston stared at the door which the departing young man had closed behind him with unnecessary haste and vigor and rubbed his eyes.

"Well, I'll be darned," he muttered, starting to his feet. "Yes, I'll be completely darned."

Out in the street there was an ominously quiet crowd, and Gaston, as he emerged, saw that it was made up mainly of the men who once had been employed at his camp.

"Don't say a word," said Hollenbeck, the lawyer, coming up. "They're going to run Bradley's gang out of camp tonight."

"That will mean a fight," said Gaston.

"A fight is what those boys are after," chuckled Hollenbeck.

Gaston dove into the quiet crowd and dragged out Tom Pine.

"Where are the gangsters?" he demanded.

"Up in the company boarding-house with the doors barred. But don't worry; we'll get 'em; the whole camp is with us tonight, and they're going to be got right."

"No," said Gaston curtly.

"Eh?"

"Nobody can tell what will happen if the boys go up there."

"Oh, yes, we can. First we'll ask 'em to come out peaceably and be kicked out of camp like gentlemen, and then they'll tell us to go to ——, and then we'll toss 'em a couple sticks of dynamite, and they'll come out boiling and there'll be a scrap for your whiskers. Don't think you're the only one who's going to have some fun."

"There isn't going to be any riot tonight."

Gaston spoke grimly. His thoughts were of Ethel Drake, and her harsh welcome back to camp. If he could prevent it there was to be no second shock of the sort piled upon her.

"Are you going to spoil the fun, boy?" demanded Tom querulously, but he changed his tone as he sensed Gaston's stern mood. "Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Keep the boys quiet for an hour. Can you do it?"

"Yes. Then what?"

"We'll see."

Through the crowd Gaston swept and in the Syndicate store he found Ray Drake.

"Drake, you've got to play the man," he said swiftly. "Forget our quarrel for a few minutes and listen to me. The camp is out to get Bradley's gangsters. The whole camp, mind you; everybody, not just my old lumberjacks. Look out there."

He dragged the trembling Drake to the window and made him look.

"Do you see those ropes? And there's dynamite there, too, and some of the boys

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are drunk. Your crowd is up in their boarding-house. If this bunch ever goes up there there'll be a scrap that will leave the camp full of dead men in the morning. I'm thinking of your sister. I don't want that scrap to start. You're high man in the Syndicate, now that Bradley's gone. Go up there. Send them to Frost Bite Landing—Bradley's orders, say. You have got to do it."

"I can't," gasped Drake. "I—" He caught Gaston's look and drew courage from it. "Will you come with me, Thorson?"

"Yes," snapped Gaston in disgust. "Come on."

They slipped out by the back way. As they approached the door of the boarding-house where the gangsters waited, Gaston laid his hand heavily on Drake's shoulder.

"You've got to do it like a man, Drake," he warned. "Bradley's orders, remember; to the Landing, in a hurry. Leave the lights burning. Go to it!"

He chuckled as he heard Drake in the open doorway giving orders to the gang inside.

"Mr. Bradley is waiting for you at Frost Bite Landing. You are to go at once, without being seen. Start now. Leave all lights burning."

Tom Pine swore it was a dirty shame. For when the crowd came up at the end of an hour they found, in spite of the lights, an empty house. And, the danger being past, Ray Drake passed Gaston without speaking. Whereat the latter bent double with laughter.

XXVII

"AND everybody loves a winner—except the loser."

It was a week later, and Tom Pine turned from his bossing of the men who were laying the base-timbers for a new mill to greet Gaston, stopping on his way to town from the new camp which he had been overseeing, built on the site of the old.

"Your physiog looks human again, boy. A week in the bush has healed you fast. How's the camp coming on?"

"We start logging tomorrow morning," replied Gaston. "I'm going in to tell the teamsters to bring the teams out tonight."

Tom Pine sat down on a pile of timbers and shook his old head, chuckling.

"By golly, it does beat all how things come a guy's way after they've been running against him for awhile. There was you, a week ago this morning, starting out for Wolverene, feeling sure we were licked and done for, and hoping for nothing better than a chance to lay your empty hands on Bradley. Then Bradley was Skookum Chief of the district, and appearing to have everything his own way, and we were going to get kicked out of camp.

"Now Bradley, or what's left of him, is side-stepping detectives some place, the Lord only knows where, and we're back on the drive, and through the white water. And everybody falls in line, when they see we've won. Credit at the stores, credit at the bank. By cripes, as I said before, everybody loves a winner, except the loser. And the winner, boy, that's *us!* Now, I remember once, down on the old Wiscons' 'way back ——"

"*Good night!*"

Gaston went on to town. No longer was he the cautious young business man. He had played that rôle long enough. Now he walked with his old swagger, his feet seemed barely to touch the ground, he held his chin high; his eyes were bright with challenge; his lips ready to smile mischievously.

Gaston Olaf was himself again, and he gloried in his shame!

Business! Money! Success! The great material triumvirate, which most men worship and slave their lives away for, was in his hands. And there was not a thrill in all of them. But there was—Ethel Drake.

He went straight to the Drake home, and his knock loudly rattled the front door.

"How kola, Mary?" he greeted the half-breed girl who opened for him. "Miss Drake in?"

"I will see," said the servant. "What is your name, please?"

Gaston stared.

"My name?" He looked about at the chastely furnished room, at the neat dress of the maid, and he began to understand. "You know my name, don't you?"

"Yessir. But I am told to ask——"

"I see. Tell Miss Drake, Mr. Thorson is here."

"I will see if she is in."

"What! Now, see here, child of the forest, you know well enough whether she's in or not. What are you trying to do?"

"I am told to say that to all."

Gaston sat down.

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"It's come," he sighed. "Civilization has come to the bush. Well—" He was on his feet in a flash. Ethel Drake had entered and was holding out her hand to him. "Miss Drake——"

"Won't you sit down?" She smiled, but it was not the smile of old, not the smile that had warmed and thrilled him with its frank friendliness and understanding.

"Oh!" she continued, "aren't you glad that those awful times are over, and you can go along with your business in—civilized fashion? I've barely recovered from the shock I had the day we returned. But, thank Heaven, it's all over now, and I hope there'll never be any more of it. If there is I shall pack up and leave at once, no matter what Ray may say. I can't stand another time like that. One doesn't appreciate how awful such things are unless one has been back home recently."

Gaston Olaf looked at her so steadily that her small talk ceased and her eyes went to the floor. Fair she was, the fairest of women, but in those moments he had measured the vastness of the gulf between them.

"This is 'home' to me, Miss Drake," he said softly. "The North and I—we were made for each other."

She looked up at him, looked away, sighed a little, wistfully.

"Yes. Yes, I think you are. And I don't believe you wish to change."

"Change!" Gaston laughed softly. "You thought I was going to change?"

"Yes. For a while I felt sure of it; I hoped you would change permanently. You were becoming——"

"Civilized?"

"More cautious, more like other men; more as if you were going to settle down to business, and then——"

"Then I woke up!" He came to his feet with a spring, laughing boyishly. "Then I woke up, Miss Drake—You're right; I was changing; I was letting business get the best of me; letting it make a slave of me, a machine; letting it take my life and turn it into a money-making machine. Just as it does with the lives of most men. And then I woke up. I saw how I was slipping. Why, Miss Drake, I'd have been sitting at a desk the first thing I knew! Me, Gaston Olaf François Thorson, a business man! Going to business every day; working every day; never *living!* And I was born to *live*, Miss Drake, not to make money. Just to *live*."

And he looked at her and she seemed a stranger to him. Her world was not his world; what was life to her would have been suffocation to him. Her's the sheltered, feminine life. Could he adapt himself to it? He could not. No more than he could ask her to adapt herself to his life. He looked about the room, and he chuckled to think how near he had come to the trap.

"Just to live, Miss Drake," he concluded, "and so I guess I'll be going."

She made no attempt to hold him. She, too, knew they were too far apart.

"Come up to dinner tonight," she said at the door. "Ray is away, and I'm having some friends in, Mr. Loomis and a couple of others."

But Gaston Olaf was rushing away like a mad, young Spring storm. It had been a mighty close call, and he was mighty glad to have escaped.

He met two heavy-gaited miners filling the road, and with laughing arrogance shouldered them into the snow. Changed, had he? Well, not so you'd know it!

He went to Loomis's office and found that rising young mining man bent seriously over a mass of papers and smote him cruelly on the back.

"Work, you poor, prosperous slave!" he laughed. "And take a good look at me so you'll be able to tell your kids that you know what a *living* man looks like."

"What! You been drinking?" gasped Loomis.

"No, sir; just living. And, say, Loomis, you good, old square, plodding, brick of a slave, when you go up to Miss Drake's dinner party tonight you tell her that I won't be among those present. Tell her I'll be where I belong—out in the bush."

At the edge of town he paused for a moment. Fair she was, the fairest of women. Was there anything better in the world than to win a woman like her for his own?

For the second time he asked himself the question that had come to him upon his first sight of her. But this time he knew the answer: Yes, for him there was.

Out beyond the clearing, the jack-pines swayed and crooned melodiously in a stirring breeze, leisurely beckoning, calling. Gaston Olaf winked mischievously at the world-at-large, and briskly turned his face toward the woods.

THE END

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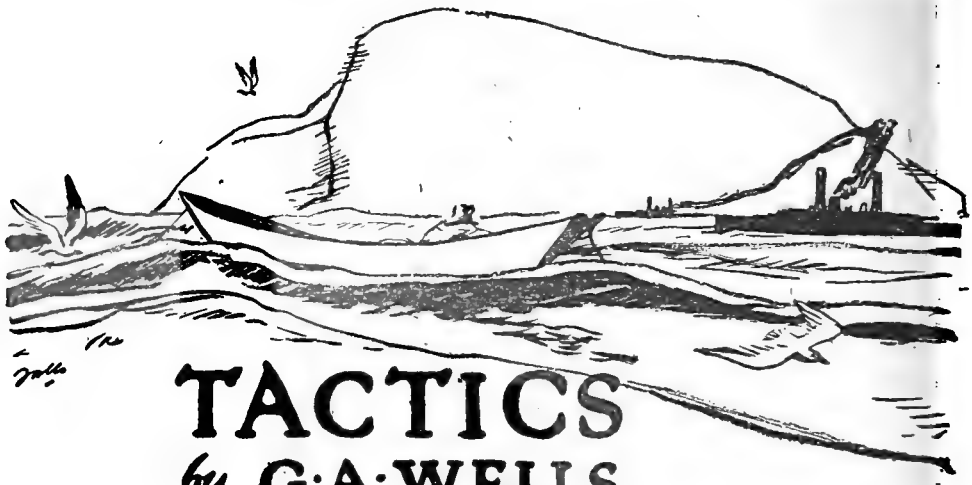

TACTICS

by G·A·WELLS

Author of "Extrahazardous."

NOW Janka did not know just where the *Mary Perkins* lay on that broad bosom of water known as the Atlantic Ocean, for that good little schooner had dropped him overside in a dory ten hours previously and immediately departed northward, presumably to drop other dories on her way. Moreover, if Janka were at all inclined to seek the whereabouts of the *Mary Perkins* his demeanor did not show it. Perhaps that was because the thick fog that hung on the water a gray pall would not permit him a sight much beyond two hundred feet.

Thus Janka, with a tub of gear in the sternsheets and a dozen or so halibut in the little pen amidships of his dory, could do nothing toward saving his life. True, he could have put out his oars and pulled, but where is one to pull when one can't see more than two hundred feet in any direction.

So in lieu of other things Janka sat on a forward thwart of the dory and wished "to Gawd somethin' 'uld come along un pick me up out'n this dirty mess." For safety's sake he pumped at intervals the little foghorn at his feet, for he was directly in the path of steamers outbound from New York. To relieve his hunger he nibbled at an onion that made his eyes smart and red until they had that appearance so common to the eyes of a man who has suffered much.

The life of a Plymouth fisherman is vagarious at best. One day he sits in a dry forecastle and sips a mug of coffee and talks to his mates; the very next day he may sit in an open dory on a tumbling sea and stare into a wall of gray fog. It is characteristic of the sea to punish those who rob her of her fruits.

Perhaps if it hadn't been for a group of earnest gentlemen in the Government War College at Newport, Janka and his dory would still be rolling on an empty sea two hundred miles off Highland Light. But Providence had so ordained that men of different nations should be hereditary enemies; and that such wars as sprang up between nations might be waged with the greatest possible chance of success certain groups of gentlemen sat up nights on end in all the capitals of the world devising ways and means for making a probability of war a certainty of victory.

The gentlemen at Newport College composed such a group. What they learned by experience and theoretical calculation they set down in little, green, limp-covered volumes which they labeled "Tactics and Maneuvers." These volumes were given out to commanding officers of battle-ships, cruisers, scouts, torpedo-boats, submarines and all other craft on the naval register.

To glean items for these several volumes the gentlemen referred to were forced to spend long hours bent in back-breaking postures over a huge board where they shuffled miniature ships of war about much like farmers playing checkers at a crossroads store. From this labor was evolved various methods of offense and defense.

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Theoretical question: "What is to prevent a hostile fleet from reducing Boston to ruins?" Captain Bayard, who knew tactics as few men know them, stooped low over the board and by deft shiftings of the toy fleets showed the questioner just why such a thing could not be. Then arose an argument, and fierce it was, as between the rules that govern theory and the chance that governs actuality.

Then in order to prove various assertions by practical application and in order that Janka and his dory should not perish from the face of the sea the general staff split the Atlantic fleet into two factors; one of the factors they called the Blue Fleet, and the other factor they called the Red Fleet. The Red Fleet was supposed to represent an enemy fleet with an eye on Boston and New York, while the Blue Fleet was supposed to represent the mailed fist of the defender bent upon the closing of that eye by theoretical capture or destruction of the Red Fleet.

Therefore, three days before Janka was set overside from the *Mary Perkins* in his dory the Red Fleet steamed out of Boston Harbor and proceeded to a point five hundred miles due east of Cape Cod. At a given chronometer time maneuvers began. The Blue Fleet, under command of Rear-Admiral Burns, steamed north from its station at Tompkinsville and threw out scouts in an effort to "spot" the Red Fleet. But the sea is wide.

Just what became of the Red Fleet one minute after maneuvers began was the question the Blue Fleet set about to answer. The ships of that fleet steamed about futilely, flinging out long tentacles that stretched away from Nantucket to Cape Ann, the battle squadron hove to with its base on Provincetown.

Two days went by, days of rain and wind and watching. The Red Fleet was not to be found. It seemed to have disappeared completely. Wireless operators of the Blue Fleet cracked their ear drums listening for signals from the enemy ships, but enemy wireless was as dead as a last year's rose. Then following the rain and wind came a dense fog that blotted out everything.

Burns, R. A., swore mildly and ordered the Blue Fleet to assemble on Provincetown until the fog lifted, then they would proceed with the search for the enemy. It was apparent from this that Burns, R. A., had not studied his copy of "Tactics and Maneuvers" as commanding officers should, for enemy ships dote on fogs.

It is highly probable that Leonard, rear-admiral—who had been dubbed "Lord of All" by upstart cadets when he commanded at Annapolis—commanding the Red Fleet, intercepted Burns's wireless for the Blue Fleet to assemble, for Burns was, as a matter of fact, just a bit indiscreet in his choice of code to convey his assembling order to the ships of the Blue Fleet.

At any rate, this last movement on the part of the Blue Fleet left Boston unprotected from the north; thus all the Red Fleet had to do was to steam in and theoretically bombard the city. It was while on its way to do this very thing that the lookout on the *Connecticut*, flagship of the Red Fleet, heard the shrill bleat of a fog-horn somewhere in the fog.

SOUNDS like a small boat's signal, sir," said he to the watch officer on the bridge.

"One of those —— fishing pots!" muttered the watch officer petulantly. "Can't move without running 'em down or picking up a mile or so of nets with the propellers. Better give him a blast to keep away, Taylor," he said, turning to the quartermaster.

It is not the best of tactics to break silence when approaching an enemy's shores, but at the same time it is brutal to run down a boat in a fog; so Taylor pressed a button on the pilot-house wall and the deep note of the siren went booming away through the thick fog. It was answered almost immediately by a series of bleats from a shrill-throated fog-horn somewhere in the gray wall. The watch officer frowned. The stranger's fog-horn held a plaintive note.

"Yes, sir, sounds like he's in trouble, sir," said Taylor, interpreting the expression in the watch officer's eyes.

"—— ass!" exploded the watch officer. "Haul the cone down to quarter-speed, Taylor, and set the indicator when you get an answer. We can't leave the fool out here in a fog to get run down; he's smack in the regular lane. We ought to though, —— him!" he added.

The speed cone of the flag-ship was hauled down to indicate quarter-speed, and when all ships answered that they understood Taylor pressed the siren button and gave the execution signal. The fleet was now moving at quarter-speed, some three miles an hour.

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"Now let him have a few blasts to guide him in," said the watch officer. Taylor did so, receiving in reply intermittent cries from the other's fog-horn. Presently a dory containing a single occupant lumbered out of the gray wall on the port side of the battleship. Very few men can successfully negotiate a ship's side from a small boat in a running sea, but Janka was one of the few, and at length clambered up the side ladder of the larger ship and sank to the deck exhausted.

"Oh, Gawd! It's pleasin' to be in out'n that," he said weakly with a fling of his hand toward the fog. "I've been days un days there!"

Parks, the boatswain's mate who had seen to the salvaging of Janka, knowing something of dory life on the fishing grounds, inquired—

"Where's your mate?"

Again Janka's arm went toward the fog.

"Oh, Gawd! Poor ole Dobbin!"

His voice trembled as he spoke.

"Overside, eh?" said Parks. Janka nodded disconsolately. "Yes, poor old Dobbin," said the boatswain's mate compassionately. "Anyhow, take him in and get him some dry togs and a bite to eat. Had anything to eat lately?"

"Oh, Gawd! Nawthin' 'cept onions. Oh, Gawd, no!"

So Janka was taken in to the galley where his dirty, fog-wet clothes were removed by kind hands and hung up in the galley to dry, They rigged him out in a regulation uniform borrowed from the paymaster's stores and let him sit by the galley fire with a plate of beans and a loaf of bread, which he washed down with a steaming cup of coffee.

"Friends is mighty good fer a man what's in out'n a fog," he said as he ate.

The cook nodded his head and stirred the fire in the galley stove. He also gave Janka some more beans and coffee.

The act of the good Samaritan having been performed once more in life's annals the Red Fleet resumed its original speed of twelve miles an hour and maneuvers went on. Janka finished his beans and coffee, pushed the empty dishes from him and wiped his greasy mouth with the back of his dirty hand.

Then he went off on a tour of inspection. He wandered here and there, staring wide-eyed at everything he saw from the highly-polished brass work on the bulkheads to the yawning breeches of the six-inch guns on the gun-deck. Quite inadvertently he came at last to the quarter-deck where Ensign Scott stood aimlessly watching the figures leap into the open face of the patent log on the taffrail. Janka broke a naval rule and approached.

"Is you the fellers what's at Plymouth two days gone?" he inquired of Ensign Scott.

Ensign Scott turned from the log and gave his questioner a cursory glance of appraisement. Many officers would have squelched such effrontery; but it so happened that Scott was an ambitious youngster with a future ahead of him, and all that came to his mill was grist for the grinding and sifting, so he naturally saw further into ordinary things than many another man in the same line of business. Janka presented possibilities.

"What fellows at Plymouth?" Scott asked with interest.

"There was some fellers like these here'n at Plymouth two days gone. They bought me liquor in Charlie Drake's saloon," replied Janka with a grin.

"A fleet at Plymouth?"

Scott studied a moment and could not recollect that Plymouth had been mentioned in the plan of maneuvers.

"What kind of a fleet? Big fleet?"

"Gawd, it were! Twenty big un little fellers. They bought me liquor at Charlie Drake's, them fellers."

"They did, eh? Well, well," responded the other with narrowing eyes centered on Janka's unlovely face. "And where did those fellows go when they left Plymouth?"

Ensign Scott leaned forward quite ill-manneredly to catch Janka's answer.

"I dunno. I comed away on the *Mary Perkins* un then ——"

"But didn't you hear any of them say where they were going?" interrupted Scott.

"Oh, Gawd, yes! Un I didn't care where they was goin' long as they bought me liquor in Charlie——"

"Well, where?" demanded Scott rudely.

"Says they it was Glo'ster, but they's drunk when they says it, them fellers."

"Drunk? Well, well. And what else did they say, my good man?" inquired the far-seeing ensign.

Janka scratched his head.

"Says as how they's goin' to fool —— out'n somebody."

"Who was it?"

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"Says it was Lord somethin'—Lord——"

He paused and looked at Scott perplexedly.

"Lord of All?" supplied Scott.

"That's 'im; fool—— out'n Lord o' All it were. But they was drunk, them fellers," repeated Janka with a shake of his head.

"Uh-huh!"

Ensign Scott knit his brows for several long moments. Then at length he said:

"My man, you're a godsend; come with me, please."

HE LED the way to the cabin hatch and down the ladder to the very door of the admiral's cabin. A marine orderly announced them to the Lord of All and they entered to find that gentleman smoking a cigaret and staring blankly at the bulkhead. Janka stopped just within the doorway twisting his hat awkwardly in his hands and gazing about at the display of finery. The week's growth of beard on his jowls and his unkempt hair set him in sharp contrast to the neatness of the cabin and its other occupants.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I believe we have picked up something very, very interesting," said Scott to the Lord of All.

"Humph!" said the Lord of All. "Why bring that derelict here to my cabin?"

Then Ensign Scott related how Janka came to be aboard and what he had said concerning the fleet at Plymouth two days gone. At the conclusion of the recital the Lord of All looked at Janka with keen interest in his gray eyes.

"So?" said he. "Anything to add, Mr. Scott?"

"Begging your pardon, sir, but it's as plain as the nose on your face. The Blues have given us the wrong steer and have gone into Gloucester to wait for us to pass in; then they'll cut us off. Seems to me, sir, their assembling code was mighty easily worked out."

The Lord of All nodded.

"That's more than a rough guess," said he. "Mr. Scott, you will take this man away and send my staff to me at once."

Ensign Scott hurried away with Janka, and in due time divers gentlemen foregathered about a table in the admiral's cabin where they pored over a chart of the Cape Cod district. Some time later the Red Fleet rounded the extreme tip of Cape Cod and laid its course almost due south.

The lead was started in the chains forward, and feeling its way through the dense fog by the aid of the sand and gravel picked up by the tallow in the end of the sounding lead, the Red Fleet came at anchor at last in the wide expanse of Barnstable Bay on the inside southern shore of Cape Cod's colossal hook. The Lord of All uttered a grunt of satisfaction as the anchors of eighteen vessles rumbled down.

"A good day's work, Captain Starks," he said to his chief of staff. "Now we shall stay here until the Blues find that we haven't taken their bait, then we shall proceed to Boston when they put out once more to search for us on the high seas. And this is the Billy Burns of Annapolis days whom everybody thought would set the world afire with his tactical knowledge! Won't he howl when he learns that he's been done to a turn? Won't he!"

The chief of staff of the Red Fleet chuckled.

"And the credit goes to an illiterate Cape fisherman picked up from a dory. It was he, too, who suggested that we put in at Barnstable Bay. The moral, sir, I think, is to grant no liberty to the men immediately prior to maneuvers."

They both laughed heartily.

And on the face of it it did seem that Boston town was to be theoretically destroyed because liberty men from the Blue Fleet had drunk liquor in Charlie Drake's saloon at Plymouth and talked too much with their mouths in the hearing of ignorant Cape fishermen.

The fog that had blanketed the water for hours held until early afternoon, when it began to thin. At length a stiff off-shore breeze came on and dissipated the gray wall in a twinkling. Then the Lord of All came up from his cabin to the quarterdeck for the evening air, and what he saw made him blink his eyes very rapidly. After that he swore profanely and called for his fiddlers three, which was his staff. Then, as if by magic, rails all about the Red Fleet swarmed with officers and men and everybody swore and wondered.

ABOUT a mile distant, bulking large against the black hills, anchors up and great clouds of smoke belching from dozens of funnels, rode a long line of blue-black men-o'-war in battle array.

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Every gun of every ship bore on the Red Fleet with startling exactitude.

"There's them fellers," said a voice in the Lord of All's very ear.

The Lord of All wheeled quickly and looked into the grinning face of Janka.

"Ah-ha! ——! The devil! What does this mean, you—you—rascal?" he burst out angrily.

Janka indicated the Blue Fleet with a nod of his head. His face was now clean-shaven and pink like a baby's.

"It means, sir, I take it, that you are in the hands of the enemy. What do you think, sir?"

Whether stirred by the sang froid of Janka or his own mortification is not recorded; at any rate, the Lord of All swore vigorously.

"—— impudence! Starks, have this man put in irons!" he bellowed.

"I beg the privileges of war and the right to eat at your officers' mess," protested Janka.

"What? Blast you!"

The Lord of All gazed earnestly in Janka's smiling face.

"Who are you, man, who are you?" he thundered.

"Lieutenant Janka, sir, of Admiral Burns' staff, sent to sea in a dory to tell you lies should you be—I quote Admiral Burns' words, sir—should you be so kind and foolish as to pick me up. There were a dozen of us to be picked up, sir; I was honored."

The Lord of All groaned in abject misery of soul.

"Captain Starks, you will please have this scoundrel theoretically shot until he is theoretically dead!"

"The honors of war, sir," laughed the theoretically condemned man.

The Lord of All was taken aback, then with a twitching of his lips he grabbed Janka's hand and shook it heartily.

"God forgive you the deception, Janka, but you have saved your country," he growled. "We shall go below and drink, then I shall have the honor of surrendering to you."

So the staff escorted Janka below to drink, and in due time the Lord of All surrendered his sword because he was theoretically captured, he and all appertaining unto him.

THE OLD PROSPECTOR

BY MARY CAROLYN DAVIES

I want to take the trail again—
I want to pack my blankets on my back,
And flop a bannock in the frying pan;
I want to load a pack-horse, and to swear
A while when he begins to peddle cans
Of beans and milk all down the mountain-side,
Scared at a bear or something on the trail—
I want to stake a claim
Up there beside a creek I know,
And if they tried to jump ir for me
I've not forgotten how to use a gun.
There's lots of gold up there and copper too.
Oh, I'll go back and strike it rich some day—
I want to know those clean, sharp peaks again
And feel the tricky trail beneath my feet,
Where far above, below,
The ruined timber stands as gaunt and grim
As silent as a dead man.
I want to see the grim old glacier lie
Chuckling a little at us as we pass.
I want to sleep
On my old bunk again
And feel the cold
Gnaw through my blankets at me
And dream of getting out of all that hell
To where the beds are soft and rooms are warm,
To some place, well—like this!

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THE OLD-TIMER

by RUSSELL A. BOGGS

Author of "The Last Wire," "With His Record Clear," etc.

IT WAS shortly after midnight when old Tom Deming, third trick operator at Tilton—"TN"—block office, heard "KS", the block office seven miles east of Tilton, report number eleven, the westbound limited, by. Mechanically he picked up his pen and entered the figures on his train sheet; twelve-seven was the time. Then he reached for the key.

"13 (I understand)," he spelled on the wire—"TN."

Old Tom's wrist and forearm wabbled uncertainly as he spaced the figures and letters, his fingers holding the key stiffly. And, having acknowledged the "OS," he promptly called "UY," the block office eight miles west of him.

"36 (block wanted) for No. 11 Eng. 1478," he said.

"2 (clear block) for No. 11 Eng. 1478," at once came the answer from UY.

"13—TN," said old Tom and closed the key, a hint of weariness showing in the motions as he did so; for as he had made the last dots and dashes on the wire his grip on the key had relaxed, and he had finished by pounding the button with first his index finger and then his middle finger.

His arm felt strained and tired; he seemed almost to lose control over its muscles.

Tom held up his right hand after he had closed the key, and regarded it soberly, working his stiff fingers.

"Old!" he muttered. "Old! I've lost my swing and I'm losing my grip. How much longer——"

He broke off, a sort of hunted look replacing the half-desperate gleam in his gray eyes. For the last five years he had been asking himself how much longer he could hold on—ever since he had switched from the first to the third trick on account of the lighter duties the latter period entailed, there not being so many trains during the night as during the day; this, of course, affording him more opportunity to conserve the powers of his failing arm.

Within the past year, and particularly within the past month, he had been asking himself the question more often as he realized how badly his arm was going back on him, and he now gazed morosely at the failing member. Then, after a few minutes, he dropped his hand to the table and stared out into the wild March night where the switch and cross-over lights flickered.

It had rained nearly all the day; then, about seven o'clock in the evening, the wind had hauled into the northeast and the weather had grown slightly colder, and the rain had turned into a nasty, half-snow precipitation that covered the ground with a thin, sloppy slush.

Tom Deming was not exactly old. He was forty-four exactly. But he had been on the road as an operator since he was twenty; and when an operator has seen twenty-four years of continuous service he is called old, regardless of his actual age. Therefore Tom Deming was called old; and he was aware that there was indeed some truth in it—insofar, at least, as his ability was concerned.

His health was good, his ear as quick as

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ever—but his control of wrist and arm was drifting. Nevertheless he fought against it; he had had a run-in with the dispatcher—a man fourteen years his junior—only a few nights since.

"Dash it, man, wake up!" the dispatcher had flared at old Tom, who was pounding out a string of OS's to him. "Hustle 'em up. I can't wait all night on you!"

The rebuke had bitten deeply into Tom; but he had given no sign of it.

"Sonny," he had answered, "don't be fretful. I was blocking trains when you were learning your A B C's."

"That's just it!" had flashed the dispatcher. "You're getting old. We'll have to run out the test car and get rid of some of you old has-beens."

The jest had been a cruel one, an inconsiderate one. But Tom had never whimpered, it being part of the railroader's creed to accept what comes, unflinchingly; he must look for no consideration, ask for no mercy.

And only this night, shortly after he had come on duty, at eleven o'clock, Tom had had a clash with a young operator in the division relay office. Tom had been sending in a bad-order car report, rattling out the letters and figures with erratic fingers, his head bobbing up and down in unison with his wrist. The relay operator, who had broken him several times, finally grew exasperated.

"Come on, old man!" he had snapped. "Lift your feet! I got lots of other things waiting on me. You ought to get a bug."

"Throw your cigaret away, and then maybe you can give a little attention to your work!" old Tom had come back, sturdily.

But in his heart he knew the relay operator was right; his stuff had been punk, rotten.

Tom had a "bug"—a machine for sending on the wire—and after he had finished the bad-order report he had glared at the shining thing, standing discarded on the table, in the corner up against the wall—a quivery, spidery thing, all springs and pivots. After he had purchased the bug he had tried for a month to master it; but he had the old-time operator's repugnance for them, and at last, in disgust, he had tossed it into the corner. He hadn't touched it since.

The March wind, driving the wet snow before it, howled around the little block office; the chilling, cold air poured up into the room through the two slots in the floor where the block levers stood. Tom drew his feet up onto the rungs of his chair to escape the draft, and shivered; the shiver was not entirely due to the damp chill, however.

There was Cassie, and the two boys: Tom, Junior, aged sixteen and Davy, aged fourteen. How was he going to take care of them—afterward? He couldn't bring himself to think of it as "after being let out"—he designated it as afterward. He had the veteran operator's fear of being forever shut out from his work. It threw him into a kind of panic when he tried to think of some other line of work that he could follow—afterward. He was past the age where he could easily take up something new. It would be hard; there seemed to be nothing.

Often, of late, he had imagined Cassie's dark eyes had been following him with a questioning, haunting expression. Perhaps he imagined this because of the strain under which he was working; nevertheless he couldn't shake off the feeling that she also knew, some way, that he was slipping.

If she did, though, she never spoke of it—nor did he. They avoided the subject as if by some subtle, mutual understanding. Brave Cassie, with her cheerful words and unending faith! The matter took on tragic aspects when Tom thought of what it would mean to her, and the boys.

The one thing which with his whole heart he longed to do was altogether out of the question. That was to buy the old Wiley place—a little farm of thirty-some acres, with a snug little house and barn, one mile back in the country from Tilton block office. The place was offered at a low figure: four thousand dollars. But as far as Tom was concerned it might almost as well have been triple that, his net savings for the twenty-four years totaling but slightly over four hundred dollars; one does not grow wealthy in the railroad telegraph service.

Tom turned from the window and sighed in discouragement as he thought of the price.

"If I only had it," he reflected hopelessly, "I'd be fixed. The boys could handle a big end of the work, and with what I'd be able to do we could get along. I could still hang on here for maybe a year or two, and

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then, when I did have to—quit, I wouldn't have to worry. But four thousand——"

HIS chin dropped dejectedly on his breast; and so absorbed was he that he did not hear No. 11's whistle, floating faintly above the roaring wind, call for the block. Still, some sixth sense seemed to warn him, and he suddenly peered out through the east window. No. 11 was drifting in to a stop, her headlight looming up not more than fifty feet from his office!

"Judas!" ejaculated Tom and sprang for his levers.

He grabbed the westbound one and swung the signal into clear. No. 11's whistle tooted short response to the belated acknowledgement, the throttle was pulled open, and, with gathering speed, the train rolled by.

Tom held the block lever back with his foot and leaned forward to squint out at the coaches. He heard something thump against the weather-boarding of the office, and looking up he saw the baggage-car door standing wide open, the baggage-master, Tom's old friend Joe Deans, standing in the square of light, his hand upraised in passing salutation. Tom raised his own hand likewise, and the train sped away.

Thus had the salutation between the two taken place every other night since Tom had gone on third trick. Every other night Joe Deans went through on No. 11, and always at Tilton he tossed off a folded newspaper, secured with a rubber band, for Tom Deming. He knew the paper would help to shorten the long nights for his old acquaintance.

Tom OS'd No. 11 to his two connecting block offices and to the dispatcher, then went outside and got his paper. He brought it into the office and spread it under his single, shaded lamp. The first thing which caught his eye was this:

$5000 REWARD IS OFFERED FOR BANDIT

The Union Express Company offers five thousand dollars reward for the capture of Lefty Phil, the bandit who yesterday held up and shot an expressman in Baltimore.

Then followed a lengthy account of the daring hold-up in the streets of the Maryland city. The robber had stopped the express wagon and demanded that the driver surrender a package of currency, apparently having knowledge that it was in the expressman's possession. The driver had shown signs of fight and the robber had promptly shot and dangerously wounded him, then made off with the money, rumored to be anywhere from twenty-five to fifty thousand dollars.

The bandit had been seen and recognized as Lefty Phil, but he had gotten away and all efforts to capture him had thus far failed; hence the offered reward. Lefty Phil was described as being a man of about thirty, of average height and build, black eyes and smooth face.

"Lots of these hold-ups and rewards," reflected Tom derisively as he turned a page after finishing the account. "Must be money in the business. There's that ten thousand they're offering for Lone Hal, who got away with the big pile from the bank messengers. I should have been a detective—and got rich!"

He flipped over another page disgustedly, and skimmed over it. And finally, when he glanced over everything which interested him, he took his pencil and began to make idle figures on a piece of clip. 5000 were the figures he used most often, and from it he would absently subtract 4000; the 1000 remainder he would subdivide into various things: a team of horses at 400, two cows at 160—bees, a wagon, a plow, a harrow—farm implements of all kinds, picking and choosing with a cynical amusement.

And it was while thus entertaining himself, some thirty minutes after No. 11 had passed, that he heard Winslow Junction, fifteen miles west, report the limited arrived at twelve fifty-one. And then the operator at Winslow Junction told the dispatcher something else; something that set Tom's pulse leaping.

"The bulls were waiting in the yards on No. 11 and they surrounded her as quick as she came. But there was no Lefty Phil on the blind baggage. They searched the whole train but couldn't find a trace. The conductor reported the only place they even slowed up was at Tilton. If Lefty got away it must have been there."

"Dash it!" flashed the dispatcher. "OK."

Then he called TN swiftly.

"I—TN," answered Tom.

"Did No. 11 slow up there?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

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"Didn't see her till she was almost up to me—didn't hear her blow for the block."

"Why?"

"Too much wind, I guess."

"Deuce take it!" exploded the dispatcher. "You've spoiled everything! We had Lefty Phil all rounded up, and now he's gotten away. Some cop saw a man he said was Lefty Phil climb on the blind baggage as No. 11 pulled out of the Superior yards. He notified us and we had the cops waiting at Winslow Junction to gather him up, because he couldn't have gotten off anywhere between Superior and there without breaking his neck—that is if you hadn't slowed her up at TN. You've busted the whole works!"

The dispatcher held the wire open for a minute, as if too irritated to say more.

"Keep your eye peeled," he at last said. "He must have unloaded there and you may get a glimpse of him. We'll send a couple of bulls there on the first thing east, but that'll not be for two or three hours yet. I expect he's already beaten it away from there, though; but we'll send 'em anyway."

"OK," replied Tom.

He dropped his chin on the palm of his hand and once more stared out of the west window. He was getting old, that's all there was to it; he was jamming things up right.

Someway or other the fact that Lefty Phil might still be lurking around the block office did not at first strike Tom; he accepted the dispatcher's opinion that the bandit would probably have made all speed away as true. But suddenly it did occur to Tom that on a raw, wet night like this a man's instinct would be to seek shelter even if he was pursued.

And it might well be that Lefty Phil did not know the officers were aware he was on No. 11. Maybe he would accept the chance to drop off at Tilton as a rare opportunity to further dumfound his pursuers. In that case he surely would not expose himself to the weather needlessly. He would be more likely to hang around Tilton until some drag, some freight, came along, then board it.

AND as these thoughts came to Tom, gazing out of the window, something else that was singular all at once struck him. Through the west window, whence he was looking, ordinarily there were three switch-lights visible: one at each end of the cross-over, and one at the little spur which connected on to the east-bound main track, a hundred yards west of the block office. But now, as Tom looked, there were but two lights visible. Either one light had blown out, or else there was some object interposed between it and the window.

"That's funny!" muttered Tom.

He concentrated his gaze; and a sudden chill swept over him, his heart hammered against his ribs. Surely—yes, surely that was a man's face, indistinctly outlined just at the edge of the shaft of light which filtered out of his window.

He held his breath, as if to quiet the pounding within his breast. With a great effort at casualness he turned his head and pretended to be copying something on a message pad. And then, after a moment, he again looked out the window. Three lights were visible now!

Once more he turned to his message pad, as if he had seen nothing of interest, and made believe that he was busy.

He tore the fake message from the pad and hung it on a hook. He sat back in his chair, idly. Once he even whistled a little. He poured some coal into his stove, emptying the bucket. His brain was filled with seething thoughts and plans. He got the broom and swept the little office; and as he opened the door to sweep out the dirt he half expected to hear a gruff voice hail him from the darkness. For he felt, somehow, that Lefty Phil's dangerous eyes were watching him as the bandit hugged the side of the building, under the eaves.

Nothing happened, however, as he opened the door. He brushed out the dirt, glanced around carelessly, and closed the door again. His nerves were taut and straining.

Tom sat down on his chair again, his unheeding ears filled with the clatter of the clicking telegraph instruments. Twice he ventured a glance out the west window; and each time the three switch-lights were disclosed. Ten minutes later he opened the key of the train wire.

"Is there anything close, either way?" he asked the dispatcher.

There was an instant's delay; Tom knew the dispatcher was consulting his train sheet.

"No," came the reply then.

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"I'd like to go out for a little bit—want to get a bucket of coal," said Tom.

"All right," said the dispatcher shortly. "Next thing there will be extra west 3279. Will make TN about one fifty-five."

"OK," said Tom.

"Watch Lefty Phil doesn't run off with you," added the dispatcher sarcastically. "We could never do without you."

Tom made no reply to that, merely pushing his key shut; but his face flushed hotly. It was evident the dispatcher believed the bandit had long since hastened from Tilton, and, although resenting the sarcasm, for some reason Tom was glad he had not asked if there had been any sign of Lefty Phil.

Slyly opening the drawer beneath the telegraph table, Tom quickly slipped a pistol from it to his coat pocket. It was a short, stubby pistol, a thirty-eight caliber gun which he had carried every night since he had been on third trick. He had never really expected to need it, but it had always given him a certain feeling of security on the dark twenty minutes walk from home to the lonely block office at Tilton; the pistol had come to be as much a part of his equipment as his lunch box. He also had a little electric flash-light in the drawer, and this he likewise put in his pocket.

He looked at the clock. It was one twenty-four. That would give him thirty-one minutes before extra 3279 came. He opened the door and went out, coal-bucket in hand.

A few steps brought Tom to the little coal-house. He swung the door open and flashed his light within. No person was there.

He filled his bucket, and retraced his steps back to the office. He set the bucket down outside, not opening the office door, and cautiously edged along under the eaves to the rear of the building, where he peered around the corner. It was not so dark but that he could see no one was there. He slid along the rear to the next corner and peeped around on that, the west side. Nobody was on that side, either.

The light that came through the front windows disclosed that no person was concealed there. The bandit had gone away from the block office, at least, and there was but one place remaining where he could possibly find shelter. Tom looked down the track to where the switch-light twinkled on the little spur. And on the spur, he knew, there were three box cars standing.

"He's in one of those cars, if he's anywhere near," Tom decided, and stood considering a moment.

Then, turning up his coat collar to shut out the wind and the wet, melting snow flakes, he slipped carefully down the track, his right hand clutching his stubby pistol, carefully keeping to the extreme edge of the right-of-way so that his silhouette might not be seen against the lighted office windows or any of the switch-lights.

In a few minutes the outlines of the box cars loomed up before him. He stooped low so that his head would be below the level of the car floors, and crept along the side of the first car.

He came to the door and with the greatest caution reached a hand up. The door was closed. He rose to his feet, flattening himself against the car, and fumbled in the darkness until his fingers found the clasp. There was a seal on it, unbroken.

"Loaded and sealed!" was the thought that flashed through his head. Therefore the man could not be within.

He went forward to the next car. That door, too, was closed and sealed. There remained but the third and last car, and he crawled ahead until he came to the middle of it. That door was open, as his prying fingers apprised him, and he kept to his stooping posture.

Tom listened with straining ears. Not a sound came from the car above him for several minutes. And then, after a little, he did hear something—a gentle stir, as if some one within the car had shifted a foot, scraping it softly on the floor!

Tom shrank back into the darkness, clear under the car, his temples throbbing with his thumping pulse. Lefty Phil was in there! He was certain of that.

He eased himself down, sitting on the rail, the back of his neck touching the draft rods. Now what?

He could not crawl into the car after the bandit. Lefty Phil was a dangerous man, and armed, beyond doubt. With his pistol the gunman could pick Tom off as soon as he loomed in the doorway. The thing to do was to take him by surprise. And then the thought came to Tom that, when extra 3279 came, the bandit would come out. He'd want to catch that freight. A plan formed in Tom's brain.

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Twenty minutes passed; and Tom, huddled motionless under the car, grew chilled and wet. The raw wind penetrated through his clothing and blew the wet flakes against him. He was becoming cramped from his uncomfortable position and the enforced lack of movement. And then, all at once, he heard extra 3279 whistle around the curve east of the office.

The train's head-light flashed into view, and again the whistle shrieked—for the block, this time. Tom heard her shut off and the air-brakes fly on as she received no response to her call for the signal.

FOOTSTEPS, almost lost in the rumble of the train, sounded in the car above him, and in a second a pair of feet and legs dangled before his eyes—as if the owner were easing himself out of the car by first seating himself on the car floor, probably mistrustful of the treacherous footing on the ground. Tom balanced himself on the balls of his feet, his pistol in his right hand, and lunged forward, wrapping his arms around the dangling legs.

There was a profane exclamation of amazement as the bandit was jerked from the car. He struck the sopping ground with a thud, Tom on top.

And then things began to happen. The bandit twisted and kicked and swore, flailing out with both hands and feet, clawing and scratching—and Tom responded in kind.

"Surrender!" grunted Tom hoarsely. "I'll shoot!"

"Shoot and be dashed!" breathed the gunman, straining to catch Tom's wrists; probably he figured that as long as he could keep his assailant busy accurate shooting would be difficult. He redoubled his efforts, and in the struggle Tom's pistol went off with a bang—harmlessly, however.

Tom yanked again to release his hand from his adversary's grasp, and again inadvertently pulled the trigger, with a resultant loud report. But the gun hand came free, and, contriving to clutch the pistol by the barrel, he hammered the robber's head with the butt.

At the second blow the bandit's hold grew weaker and at the third blow relaxed altogether. Tom desisted as he felt the man's resistance crumble; and then he heard the scuffling of oncoming, hastening feet, and looking toward the block office he saw bobbing lanterns coming toward him.

He sat back, puffing and blowing, as the first light neared him. He looked up, and perceived the eager face of Conductor Lew Marshall, whom he had known for fifteen years; and right behind the conductor came Engineer Sam Rice, whom he had known as long; while trailing the engineer came the fireman and a brakeman, the rays of the lanterns shining on their expectant countenances.

"What the devil!" cried Lew Marshall, swinging his lantern into Tom's face, then down on the fallen bandit, who, stirring and moaning, was trying to sit up. "What's the matter here, Tom?"

"Lefty Phil," panted Tom, pointing to the robber. "I captured him."

The conductor stared; evidently he also had read the papers.

"I'll be danged!" he gasped in amazement. "Lefty Phil!" He looked down at the operator. "Tom, that's worth five thousand to you!"

Tom managed to grin as he rose to his feet.

"I'm hoping so," he said.

"How did he get here, and how did you know it?" demanded the engineer. He clutched a monkey wrench in his hand, that probably having been the most available weapon in sight when they had heard the shots.

"He was on No. 11," explained Tom. "The bulls were looking for him and it seems one of them saw him get on the blind baggage as she pulled out of Superior yards?"

"But how did he get off here?"

Tom took the brakeman's lantern before answering and held it close to the reviving robber.

"He's of average height and build," he said, nodding, "and his face is smooth, even if it is grimy with dirt and cinders. We'll likely know in a minute or so if his eyes are dark." Which thought caused him to stoop and run his hands through the man's clothes; he might come to and make things unpleasant, prematurely. In a hip pocket Tom found a black, wicked-looking automatic pistol; he regarded it a second, then dropped it into his own pocket and continued the search. There was no other weapon.

"Now he'll be safer," said Tom, straightening up; and he went on with his broken explanation. "Why, you see, I didn't hear

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11 whistle for the signal and I slowed her up with a slow block." And he told his friends the trainmen just how things had come about.

They heard him in astonishment, and when he had finished Lew Marshall caught his shoulder and shook him lovingly.

"Tom, you old duffer!" he cried. "You've got the nerve of the devil! That five thousand is yours, just as sure as your shootin' was bad!"

Tom grinned again and looked down at his captive; the gunman was just opening his eyes, stupidly.

"Dark eyes!" announced Tom. "He measures up as per specifications."

"Come on, Lefty Phil!" cried Lew Marshall,reaching down and grasping the bandit's arm. "Wake up! The bulls are looking for you!"

The prisoner rubbed the sore spot on the back of his head and blinked a little in an endeavor to clear his beclouded senses. He stared around sourly with his dark eyes.

"Lefty Phil me eye!" he snarled. "You've got the wrong guy!"

They laughed enthusiastically at him.

"That's right," approved Marshall. "Don't you admit anything. Keep it all for the judge."

The bandit muttered profanely to himself, casting a wary glance about him.

"Now don't you try to run away," admonished Tom. "I've got one pistol in my hand and yours in my pocket."

At which the bandit scowled savagely, but made no reply.

"You might tell us your right monicker, though," urged Marshall. "That is, if we really have it wrong."

But his only reward, likewise, was silence and a stubborn setting of the prisoner's jaw.

"Well, I guess the cops'll know you, anyway—when they get here," said the conductor, resignedly.

It wasn't every day he got an opportunity to josh a real bad man.

Apprehension flashed into the captive's eyes at that, and he made as if to rise to his feet.

"Sit still!" ordered Tom, with a flourish of his pistol; and as the bandit settled back on his heels again Tom addressed the trainmen.

"I believe I better take him up to the office and keep him there till the cops come. You fellows'll be wanting a clearance and to get moving, too."

"All right," said Engineer Sam Rice and took hold of the prisoner's coat collar. "Come along, friend! Just one crooked step, mind, and I'll make that sore spot on your head a lot sorer!" And he shook the monkey wrench in his hand.

They quickly reached the block office, in front of which the deserted engine stood, its long string of cars stretching back into the darkness. And as they crowded through the doorway with the prisoner Marshall all at once turned to Tom as if some new thought had suddenly come to him.

"By George, Tom!" exclaimed the conductor. "You want that five thousand, don't you?"

"Surest thing you know!" replied Tom. "I'm getting old—I need the money!"

He smiled at Marshall; but the conductor appeared to understand the tragic wistfulness which the words and manner covered, and he cracked a fist into his open palm.

"Then may I be rawhided to a cinder if you don't get it!" Lew Marshall cried. "Listen! It'll never do to let the bulls get their hands on this fellow. If they do it'll be good night to your reward. They'll claim it for themselves!"

Tom stared a little, comprehending. There is not much love lost between the other railroad employees and the railroad police.

"By Jove—you're right!" he admitted, a sudden panic assailing him at the prospects of losing what he had taken such risks to gain.

"So I'll tell you what we'll do!" went on Marshall. "We'll just take this gunman along with us to Winslow Junction. Our run ends there and we'll just slip him over and into the police station without any of the bulls ever seeing him!" He looked at Engineer Sam Rice. "What say, eagle-eye?"

Sam Rice slapped his leg in glee.

"You bet!" he cried. "Give Lew that gun you took from the bad man! And we'll make the sergeant at the police station give us a receipt for the prisoner, a receipt in your name, Tom! That'll settle any question or dispute when it comes to seeing who gets the money!"

He shoved Tom toward the telegraph table at the front of the office.

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"Give us that clearance, old-timer," he commanded, "and we'll hit the ball!"

THE hours dragged for Tom Deming after extra 3279 had departed, the prisoner in the caboose in charge of Lew Marshall. At three-thirty-five A. M. he heard Winslow Junction report extra 3279 arrived. Marshall had promised Tom to have the operator at Winslow Junction call him as soon as they could get back to the junction office after smuggling the outlaw over to the police station; so when four-thirty came, and still no word, Tom began to get anxious and to cast worried glances at the clock.

Five-thirty came, and then six-thirty—and he heard nothing. Neither had any of the railroad police shown up, as the dispatcher had said they would. And, thinking of this in connection with his failure to hear from his friends, Tom decided that something had gone wrong. The police must have discovered the robber in the caboose and gotten him away from the trainmen, he concluded. The thought threw him into another panic, his nerves already worn to a frazzle by the night's events.

He paced the office floor nervously, unable to sit still; and when the office clock pointed to a quarter of seven he looked out the window to see if there was any sign of the first-trick man's coming to relieve him. He wanted to get away, to get out into the air and away from the strain of waiting and listening. And, then, with a startling abruptness that made him jump, he heard Winslow Junction call him on the side wire.

"I—TN," answered Tom to the call.

"That you Deming?"

"Yes."

"There's a conductor and engineer, Marshall and Rice, in here," began Winslow Junction, "and they say to tell you they took that crook over to the police station. They just got back, and they say that bandit was not Lefty Phil after all——"

The wire flew open as Tom, who had been holding the key shut with one finger, let his hand fall from the button in sudden dismay. His face went white.

"Not Lefty Phil!" he gasped dazedly.

To have the trainmen succeed in getting the man to the police station, after all his worrying, and then to find it was not Lefty Phil. . . His plans, the farm, his joyful surprise for Cassie—all seemed suddenly to collapse, and to crumble and dissolve before his eyes. A clutching weariness and weakness crept over him. He reached a shaky hand for the key.

"Not Lefty Phil—" he contrived to spell out, with many false dots and dashes.

"No!" broke in the operator at Winslow Junction. "No, it wasn't Lefty Phil. It was Lone Hal, you lucky stiff! The cop who saw him get on No. 11 in Superior Yards only caught a glimpse of him and he thought it was Lefty Phil. But he was wrong—the police sergeant identified him as Lone Hal!

"The bulls got wind of it, some way, that Marshall and Rice had the bandit they thought was Lefty Phil, and they started after 'em. But the conductor and engineer saw 'em coming and they beat it with Lone Hal. They kept doubling with him all over town—that's why they were so long getting back here.

"But they finally gave the bulls the slip and landed their man in the police station without the coppers ever laying a hand on him. They'll tell you all about it when they see you next—they're as tickled as a couple o' kids. My word, Tom, you'll get ten thousand instead of five! Luck—good gosh!"

Old Tom Deming tried to break in; but at first his over-worked, stiff wrist and hand were impotent. The surprise, the sudden elation after the sudden depression, was too much and his nerveless fingers merely rested helplessly on the key, making unreadable stutterings. It was only after a half-dozen or more attempts that he partly gained control over himself.

"Thanks!" he pounded out uncertainly. "Tell the boys thanks. I can't say any more now—I'm all up in the air. I'll sure see 'em again, and then I'll tell 'em right!"

And he shoved the key shut and buried his head in his arms on the desk.

"It'll be all right now, Cassie!" he muttered in a half-choked voice. "It'll be all right now, girlie!"

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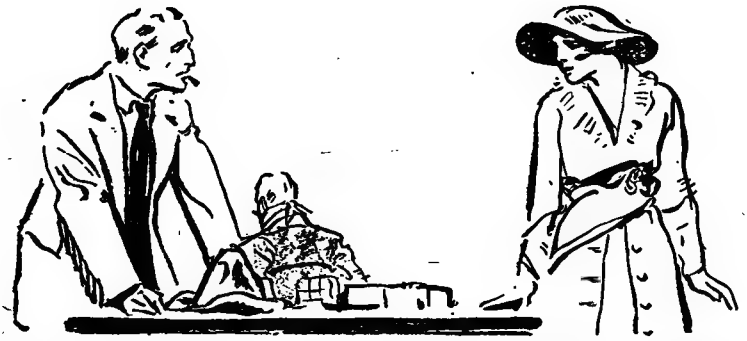

BILLY JUNE AND THE SINEWS OF WAR

by WILBUR HALL

Author of "Billy June and the Man Going Out," and "Billy June and Padre Paolo's Revolution."

BILLY JUNE was homesick.

Unless it was Billy himself, every one in Rio de Janeiro knew it; some of them even went so far as to proclaim the immediate cause of the "trouble-shooter's" nostalgia—a song that was quite the rage on the *Avenue* and the *Passeo*, and the last line of which was: "In the good old U. S. A."

Whether or not they were correct the fact remains that June, for twelve years a free-lance expert in straightening out tangles large and small in South America, and reported to have grown rich at the unique profession, was thinking of the peach and prune orchards of the Santa Clara Valley, in California, where he was born; and was wondering how long it would be before the land of his nativity would be drawn into the world war.

Billy had had experience of wars on a small scale in South America, where wars grow up overnight from the most insignificant of disputes or misunderstandings, and he had also had experience of diplomacy, that gentle art of saying one thing, meaning another, and making your opposite believe that you mean a third. Consequently it is not improbable that Billy June knew more of the danger in which the States stood than most of the people living their fat and secure lives therein, and that he was better able to foresee and prognosticate the imminent storm.

If it was true that Billy was homesick it is very likely that he was really itching, secretly, to get back to the land that had nurtured and educated him so that he might take some small part in developments if the worst—which he feared—should come.

Unfortunately—as it seemed to him—Billy was under contract, however, in the Winter of 1916, with the Hawkins-Haworth Syndicate to straighten out a railroad property in the southern part of Brazil where graft and incompetence had come near to wrecking a ten-million-dollar plant, and it looked like the remotest possibility that he would be able to get away under a year, homesick or not.

Even the telegram he received, a few days after Christmas, from old Parker Hawkins himself did not encourage him, in spite of the fact that it came from Caracas, which is in Venezuela, considerably nearer Washington than is Rio. Parker Hawkins was the president of the syndicate's board of directors, his home was in London, and he hadn't been in South America for eight years. Billy frowned at the telegram.

> William June, c/o Hotel Jalapa, Rio de Janeiro:
> If possible please leave matters now in hand to trustworthy subordinate and come here, via Para, immediately. Important. Rush answer paid.
>
> P. Hawkins.

Billy called a page.

"Get Edmund Doag at the *Associadado d'os Engenheiros* for me, and tell him to

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come over to my room," he ordered, handing the boy a *milreis* piece.

"*Si, Senhor* June. *Immediatamente!*"

"Well, that'll be soon enough," Billy answered, and wrote and dispatched from the hotel lobby a telegram: "Coming," to Caracas. Then he turned to a map and a letter-file full of papers relating to the railroad embroglio.

He was deeply immersed in them, making notations on the margins and pulling at his inevitable brown paper cigaret, when his assistant and confidant, Edmund Doag, whom he had attached to his staff at the time of the Amazon Railroad difficulties two years before, hurried in. Billy nodded and went on with his reading.

Doag, long accustomed to waiting on the pleasure of his imperturbable and slow-spoken chief, sat down in a window and looked out on the *Passeo*. It was crowded, as usual, with a gay afternoon throng, chattering and laughing, or deep in political discussions or arguments over the war at the café tables along the sidewalks.

Opposite the hotel two men and a woman stopped and the woman put a pretty little shoe on a coping and gestured. The two men knelt so precipitately before her that their heads came together, their hats went rolling, and both of them sat down, without dignity, on the cool pavement. A laugh went up. Doag, watching, laughed too—and then he caught a full view of the woman's face.

"*Valgame!*" he cried, unconsciously. "What a beauty! What an everlasting, hill-shaking peach!"

Billy June glanced up, scowling.

"I told you, Eddie," he growled, "that you'd better leave that Pisco stuff alone! But you wouldn't listen, and here you are, drunk as an——"

"Billy," Doag replied, in some excitement; "you're a liar, if ever there was one! I haven't touched a Pisco punch for nine weeks. But look what's here! Feast your eyes once, man! Hustle, or you'll miss it."

Billy pushed back his papers deliberately and rose, his long legs kicking themselves from under the table noisily.

"Don't rush me now, Eddie," he begged, plaintively. "Don't crowd me, and I'll get there sooner. Where's the everlasting peach?"

Doag pointed, but it was unnecessary, for Billy saw the woman immediately, and he caught his breath. Doag, who had never before know Billy June to give two glances to a woman, gazed at June closely to see whether he was being joked. But June was leaning on the window-sill, staring like a schoolboy at his first teacher, and oblivious to everything else.

Meantime the woman's escorts had recovered themselves and one of them had tied her shoe lace, to the obvious discomfiture of the other. Then they moved on a few steps and sat down at a café table, the woman with her profile to the window where the two Americans stood watching.

"Being married hasn't affected your eyesight, Doag," Billy June said. "You're right—she is a beauty. Who is she?"

Doag shook his head and continued to stare. The vision below was one calculated to stop any red-blooded man in his tracks. From the hotel window it was difficult to make out whether she was tall, or not, although her bearing gave one the impression that she was. She wore a clinging blue street suit, with a skirt recklessly short, and with the coat cut to expose a reason-wrecking V of satiny skin at the throat.

But if she had been dressed in gipsy rags or in Alaska's furs she would have been dangerously fascinating. Her face was almost perfectly carved, her nose straight, her chin rounded and dimpled, her lips provocative, and her eyes large and dark. Even across the width of the *Passeo* these details were discernible, but it was not so much the items as the whole effect of her that made the two Americans stare. Billy June drew in a deep breath of cigaret smoke.

"I need coffee," he said, hoarsely. "Let's go over and talk there, Eddie."

Doag laughed aloud.

"Why, Billy, are you snagged?" he joked. "I thought you wouldn't turn around to look at the Venus if she were to return to earth!"

"Oh, dry up, Doag!" Billy growled. "Where in tarnation is my *chappeo?*"

Doag found the hat and handed it to his stricken friend, and together they went down and crossed to the café where the goddess sat, laughing at her two companions, who, it appeared, were furiously angry with one another, and growing more so momentarily. Doag had anticipated that a nearer view would compromise the unearthly beauty of the lady, but he had to confess himself mistaken.

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As for Billy June, he came near to demolishing half the furniture in the place blundering through it like a bull in a china shop, and trying to find a seat while staring fixedly at the vision in blue. Doag, tempted to let his friend go on exposing himself to the fury of the populace he trod on, relented before trouble arose, and led June to a table.

It was not as near that of the goddess as June desired, but she could be seen, and Doag managed to restrain the trouble-shooter's impulse to throw out of their nearer places a couple of inoffensive South Americans and to distract his friend's attention long enough to order drinks. The waiter grinned at them.

"The lady is indeed *mui bella*, eh, *senhor*?" he smirked, at June's elbow.

Billy turned on him.

"You keep your mind on the job, *creado*!" he snarled. "Bring two *cocoas*, and be quick with 'em!"

"Pardon, *Senhor* June," the man gulped, paling. "I did not recognize your *excellenzia*." He backed off hastily, and almost ran for the drinks.

Doag, who was childishly happy with a Brazilian wife and a sunny-eyed baby of half a year, could afford to be unmoved in the actual presence of the strange beauty, and he began to find himself impatient over his chief's paralysis of senses. When their drinks were placed he touched Billy June's arm.

"You sent a boy for me, Billy," he began, sharply. "You didn't do that to order me a *droga*."

June fumbled in his coat pocket and tossed the telegram from Caracas across the table.

"You're elected," he said, briefly. "I'm going to Venezuela on tomorrow's boat."

Doag laughed as he picked up the sheet.

"And leave the fair charmer to the barbarians of Rio?" he taunted.

But Billy ignored him and he turned to the telegram. When he had read it through—

"What's it all about, Billy?" he asked.

"Don't know."

"Is this Hawkins the head of the firm?"

"Yep."

"What's he doing at Caracas? Does his syndicate own Venezuela as well as Brazil?"

"Part of it," Billy June grunted. "Railroads and cattle-ranges and a mine or two in the interior."

"How long will you be gone?"

"Don't know."

"Why don't you ask the lady to go along?"

Doag was enjoying himself. Billy June swung on him.

"I'll brain you with this glass in a minute!" he barked. "I sent for you to tell you that you'd take charge down below. You'll get a *conto* raise in salary. Your instructions will be at the Club tomorrow morning. Now, for Pete's sake, don't bother me."

"Oh, very well."

Doag ordered another drink, grinning, while Billy June shifted his chair so that he could gain a better view of the woman in blue.

His assistant turned to the waiter with a whisper.

"Who is she?" he inquired.

The man bent over him.

"Does the *senhor* not know? That is Mlle. Denise Boyot, the new sensation of the Havana Opera Company. They sing 'La Tosca' at the *Opera Naçional* tonight."

"Thanks."

Doag turned to Billy June with a sudden mischievous impulse.

"By the way, Billy," he said, casually, "I forgot to tell you that my beautiful wife invites you to sit in the de Barrosa box at the *Opera* tonight. There'll be half a dozen others."

Billy turned with an incredulous stare.

"What, me?" he gasped. "At the opera? Say, Eddie, if it was a cock-fight or a poker party—perhaps. But opera—you must have gone off your *cabezal*"

Eddie Doag leaned closer.

"Oh, I don't know, Billy," he said, banteringly, "you've done crazier things than go to hear 'La Tosca.' After you get used to it you won't mind it so much. Because, you see, the lady over there in blue is singing one of the rôles tonight and—Oh, I thought so! Come to the house at eight—and don't wear corduroys and high boots if you happen to have anything else!"

MR. PARKER HAWKINS was an intense, even bigoted nationalist. Before Billy June had known him half an hour he was indulging in a bitter diatribe against England's foes, and al-

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though his business concerned a boundary dispute between Venezuela and Colombia—a boundary dispute that interested the Hawkins-Haworth Syndicate because it involved the western line of one of their Venezuelan properties—it was so interlarded with the old gentleman's hatred for certain Central European powers that Billy had difficulty at times in keeping the two subjects separate in his own mind.

It was in the principal hotel in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, that the two men foregathered, almost a month after Billy had had his first taste of grand opera and after, as it turned out, he had met Mlle. Denise Boyot, the singer, at a midnight supper at the home of one of the Brazilian big-wigs and had fallen more than ever a fast captive to her charms.

Then he had sailed for Para, trans-shipped to a coaster, and spent more than two weeks being blown to pieces by an early storm, and reflecting on the beauties of the only woman who had ever turned his head. Small wonder, then, that General Parker Hawkins found the trouble-shooter a little dense.

"Now, my man," the general said, at the end of their first day's conference, "Mr. Dodwell, our Rio representative, has given us very high reports of you. I am trusting this boundary matter entirely to your discretion. But there is something more."

Billy June sighed.

"All right, General," he drawled, characteristically. "But don't go too fast for me. Give me a little time, and I'll savvy better. Shoot slow, please."

"Very good." The general masked his impatience. "The boundary dispute is important to us. But, as Englishmen, there is something far more important."

"Yes."

The old man leaned closer.

"Our Government is not unaware of the activities of the enemy in South America—and Mexico. Do you comprehend me?"

"Sure."

"Do you happen to know of any—er—enemy movements in Brazil?"

"I might."

"What are they, if you please."

"Oh, see here, now, General," Billy objected, "I'm working for the H. H. Syndicate in South America—not for the Intelligence Bureau of London, you know."

The general bridled.

"But as an employee of our syndicate, you are bound to——"

Billy reached for his broad-brimmed hat.

"I'm bound to do what I can to keep your doggone syndicate out of trouble with the South American Governments, General Hawkins," he interrupted. "After that I get what sleep I can and send part of my money home to 'the good old U. S. A.' So if that isn't all right——"

It was the president's turn to interrupt.

"That's all right, of course, Mr. June. Quite all right. Don't misunderstand me. We'll let the matter of Brazilian conditions rest. But supposing that I made you a proposition to watch a certain intrigue running through Rio de Janeiro and this place—Caracas—up through Colombia and Guatemala City to—" he lowered his voice—"to the City of Mexico, and closely concerning your 'good old U. S. A.,' as you have it. Supposing all that—what then?"

Billy June put down his hat. The unaccountable wave of homesickness that he had tried to leave behind him in Rio swept over him. It was growing on him that he had been long enough "trouble-shooting" through foreign countries—that he could afford to go home—settle down—perhaps marry. The picture of an olive-skinned girl, with a wealth of black hair, and eyes so deep a man might well lose himself in them, flashed into his mind—and stayed there.

"General Hawkins," he said, with painful deliberation, "I'm pretty slow on my feet and slower in my head. I have to take things easy until I get them rounded up. But when I do I usually can—make up my mind—where I'm—going. Suppose you put your—little proposition to me What were you saying?"

The conference that followed ended five days later. Billy was dumfounded at the amount of information General Hawkins had—much of it tallying with drifts Billy himself had noted in Rio and Para. Also he had known pretty intimately a couple of Mexican officials in the old Diaz days in Mexico City, when he was there for a group of American copper men, and these two Mexicans he had met within the year secretly engaged in some sort of rushing business in Rio de Janeiro.

It was perfectly evident that General Hawkins had been only sounding him out before—that what he had really wanted was

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to be sure of his man. Of course the general concluded, Billy's ostensible business was to be boundaries in the western part of Venezuela. His *ostensible* business!

At the end of the week the general handed Billy June a packet of official papers, including passports in four languages, traveler's checks, maps, and a code.

"We're looking to you, Mr. June," the general said. "Your only orders are 'Carry on!'"

"And if the trail leads beyond Bogota——or Guatemala City—" Billy began.

The general finished the sentence.

"If it leads around the world you are to wire us for expenses, Mr. June."

Billy shook hands and bade the general good-by. He dropped to the corridor of the hotel in the lift, paid his bill, and went out into the sunshine. And there, just entering a pearl-gray automobile at the curb, was Mlle. Denise Boyot!

She saw him as she dropped with a lithe and graceful twist of her superb body into the deep cushions of the car.

"Ah, *Senhor* June!" she cried, in oddly accented Portuguese. "Is it you? Come, ride with me."

Billy recovered himself and crossed to the machine, hat in hand.

"I left you in Rio," he said, in Spanish.

She beamed on him.

"Ah, you speak Spanish perfectly," she cried, in that language. "That is so good. This tiresome Portuguese—like Spanish spoken by German peasants! Yes, I left Rio after a week's engagement with the company. I have business here before I return to my own Havana."

"You call Havana your home?" Billy asked, in surprise. "I thought you told me you were a Frenchwoman?"

She colored, then shrugged lightly.

"*Mais non*, I am only French by birth—not by preference. Havana is my dear home. *Entrez, monsieur*, and we will drive where you will."

Her speech was an odd mixture of three languages—Spanish, French and English, the last spoken with a charming lilt, and Billy June, completely fascinated, stepped into the car.

"I have but a little time, señorita," he said, clinging to the Spanish that she seemed to prefer. "I leave tonight."

She represented herself as devastated by the news.

"Tonight? But I had thought that you might make this dreary place more light for me for a few days. I am sad."

"You?" Billy laughed. "You don't appear to know what sadness is, señorita. I can not believe you."

She put a hand on his arm, with a movement of her body toward him that was irresistible.

"Only stay here a few days," she said, abruptly. "There are so much things to see—you and I. And then—well, who knows? Will you stay?"

Billy felt himself losing his control. He tightened his arms—feeling under his right arm the bulky papers of the general, in a secret pocket, and under his left, the shoulder holster in which reposed his beloved, long-barreled revolver.

"I wish I might, Mlle. Denise," he said, and meant it. "But I'm under orders. Tonight at eleven. Until then, however——"

She moved away from him, petulantly.

"You do not wish to please me," she said, angrily. "Well, then, if you must go——"

Billy reached for the door of the car.

"I'm really sorry," he said, in a hoarse voice. "But you wouldn't ask me to stay if you knew that I'd promised my people to go on. I'm glad that I saw you, at any rate."

He half rose. Abruptly she laughed, seizing his arm and pulling him back into his seat.

"Ah, these mad *Americanos!*" she cried. "They have no heart for play-acting. Of course you shall go when you will. But first we will have a long drive—and talk—and talk—and talk. Drive, boy! Anywhere. And slowly!"

Thus it happened that General Hawkins, looking from his window and congratulating himself on the man Dodwell had picked for him in Rio, was suddenly stricken dumb by the sight of his new agent, holding the secrets of four Governments in his head, driving slowly away from the hotel with a woman whose face and bearing were disconcertingly familiar.

The general peered out after them, perspiration suddenly starting on his forehead.

"If that is Margaret Windler," he cried, aloud—then turned and rang a bell.

His confidential clerk appeared from an adjoining room.

"Telegraph blanks, Bright!" he snapped.

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"And get the British Consulate on the line for me as soon as you can. Bless my soul! Bless my soul!"

There were some busy hours for General Hawkins that night, ending at one o'clock in the morning, when his secretary, half-dead for sleep, answered the telephone.

When he had taken the message he crossed to where General Hawkins sat drowsing over a whisky and soda.

"Eh, what's that?" The general sat up with a start. "What's that, Bright?"

"The Secret Police Bureau just rang in, sir. The woman is registered here as Mlle. Denise Boyot, a grand opera singer. She left tonight on a steam yacht, supposedly for Panama."

"But June, man—June!" the general cried, testily.

"Yes sir. The officer reports that they have found papers belonging to Mr. June on the quay. The officer is holding them for you. And Mr. June can not be located. Yes, sir. Quite right, sir. Good night, sir."

THE Foreign Club, Bogota, Colombia, knows some strange people and, if it could tell the tale, hears some strange stories whispered in its corners and spoken low in its lounge and reading-room. Plotters, intriguers, spies, gentlemen of fortune and gentlemen of no fortune at all, exploiters, explorers, rich men who seem poor and poor men who like to appear rich—these are guests of this club at one time or another, although the place is highly respectable and counts among its members the best foreign element in the republic. They drift in, these queer folks, and then drift on, and sometimes a great deal is heard of them later and sometimes nothing at all.

Billy June had seen some of the visitors himself, in his time. Now he sat in one corner trying to puzzle out his position in international politics and watching the few men who came and went beyond his chair. By the simple method of wiring Edmund Doag in Rio de Janeiro he had put himself in funds. The checks General Hawkins had given him in Caracas he had left on the pier on the night of his chance meeting with Mlle. Boyot, and with them all the papers which the Britisher had provided him.

Billy had a remarkable memory—not a line, nor a name, nor a date, nor a figure in those papers was lost because the papers themselves were gone. But he had taken on a new venture, after three hours' talk with the little beauty in the pearl-gray car. That car and the fascinating owner had not gone to Panama, as the secret police of Caracas had assumed—she had gone to Guatemala City, north of the Canal, there to wait until Billy himself should overtake her and bring with him from Bogota a steamer-trunk filled with ore samples.

Billy chuckled.

"If those are ore samples," he drawled, half aloud, "then some one has found a vein of the heaviest ore I ever noticed in my wanderings. I make it about two hundred pounds. Let's see."

He took a pencil and bit of paper and calculated rapidly.

"Fifty thousand dollars American gold, eh? That's one hundred thousand, Mex. Yes, I should say that was heavy ore—and pretty valuable, too. And here comes the lady's polite friend, Lieutenant Kriege."

"Good evening, Mr. June."'

"Hello, Leftenant. I've ordered you a stein—I'm taking Scotch and soda—and very little soda. That all right?"

"Yes. Thanks. It's warm, today, and I'm irritable."

The newcomer dropped into a chair with a long sigh and wiped his forehead. He was a spruce, well-built young man of thirty, with a blond mustache and a bearing that would have denoted long army training even without the title he bore. His eyes were blue, but keen, and he wore nose-glasses that gave him an air of smartness and intellectuality that was more attractive than his bluntness and peremptory ways. Billy June disliked the man—but Kriege did not suspect that.

"Irritable, eh?" Billy said, with a grin. "Well, now, I shouldn't think anything could make me irritable if I had Mlle. Boyot for a friend."

The lieutenant shrugged.

"Oh, she is well enough, I suppose. But I'm anxious to go South on that mining deal I told you of, and this delay annoys me. You see?"

"Oh, yes, I see, fast enough," Billy returned, lightly. "South end of Peru, you said, didn't you?"

"Yes. Out from Cruzados."

"I know the place. You'll get malaria there, like as not."

"I?" The lieutenant laughed harshly.

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'I get nothing. I am well. I keep myself well. With my training one doesn't have malaria. No one but a stupid dolt has sickness."

"Excuse me." Billy bowed. "At any rate a drink won't kill you. Here's happy days—and the lady!"

"You mean Mlle. Denise? Good. The lady!"

Kriege took a long draft.

"Ah, that's refreshing. Now, then, Mr. June—when do you leave?"

"Tonight."

"With the ore samples?"

"Of course. That's what I came around by Bogota to get."

"Excellent. And one thing more."

"Well?"

"I have here from our friends Señores Reyes and Perez a packet for mademoiselle. They are arranging, as you know, for the appearance of the Havana Opera Company in Bogota and in Guatemala City. What they have accomplished here is noted in these letters."

The lieutenant spread the papers out a trifle ostentatiously on a low table.

"You will observe that they can promise the company a very good reception here in Bogota."

Billy only glanced at the sheets. There were rather a good many of them, considering the subject they discussed, but a casual reading showed that they related only to the matters of which the lieutenant spoke. Billy nodded.

"I'm not interested in grand opera, you know," he said. "Shove 'em back and seal up the envelope. I don't want to lose any of them and have Mlle. Denise in my hair over it."

The lieutenant laughed.

"No? Good enough. Let us have another little drink."

"Shoot the piece," Billy replied, agreeably. "I've nothing to do now till my train leaves."

They talked casually until ten, then the lieutenant rose and said good-by.

"Some day I may happen to meet you again, Mr. June," Kriege said. "Until then—God-speed!"

"Whatever that is!" Billy returned. "I don't think I'll put on much speed with that trunk full of ore samples. What are they, Lieutenant, anyway—lead, or coal?"

The lieutenant laughed, perhaps a little too loudly.

"Silver and zinc," he said, carelessly. "Guard them well, for mademoiselle has her whole fortune risked on the returns from those. If her friends in Guatemala and Havana are not convinced by the assays they will not enter her company, as you know. And then we both lose—she and I. It is a kindness so great that you have undertaken to deliver them for me. I thank you."

"Oh, don't mention it, Lieutenant," Billy said. "The pleasure is all yours. *Adios!*"

The precious trunk caused much profanity at the hotel and at the station, but Billy watched it closely and his distribution of a few silver pieces expedited its handling considerably. With the ore samples and his own small trunk, purchased in Bogota, safely aboard, Billy strolled up and down the platform smoking. His habitual lethargy almost delayed him too long, in fact.

The *jefe* had already called his warning signal and the locomotive bell had sounded before Billy was ready to enter his compartment. He was forced to run for it. And as he did, catching the hand rails and swinging up, another man, also tardy, whipped out from a dark corner of the depot and clambered aboard another car farther down. Billy caught one glimpse of him. Inside his own compartment he surprised his traveling companions by breaking into a hearty laugh.

"I watch the ore samples and the gang watches me!" he exclaimed, in English—and as no one near him understood a word they cast anxious glances his way, believing him insane, like all the men from the States.

But Billy was not crazy. In fact he was unusually alert and sane. When he transferred his trunks to the river steamer running down to Assuncion he went immediately to his hole in the wall called a cabin and took out the letters addressed to Mlle. Denise Boyot at Guatemala City. First, using two liquids taken from his case he made the simple tests for invisible writing. Finding nothing he then, with the aid of a pointed bit of ivory he carried and a sheet of carbon paper, made impressions of every sheet, and of every letter, accent mark, and figure on them, bringing to his task a touch so light that the originals were not defaced but so sure that not a line nor a stroke but was recorded.

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The copies, which he had traced on very thin paper, he rolled tightly and inserted in a long quill. The quill, in turn, he sewed, rather dexterously for a man, into the left lapel of his coat. After this operation was concluded—and it took many hours of diligent and painstaking work—he returned the originals to their envelope, sealing it with the greatest care, and rose to go on deck.

As he did so he heard a thud such as might have been made by a light ball striking a wall. Billy whipped around, seized the catch of his door, and threw it open. There was no one in sight on the deck. June cast his eye around the interior of his own cabin, then, descrying a small ventilator near the ceiling on the forward wall, walked outside and tried the door of the cabin next his toward the bow. The door was locked. Billy, knowing how fragile the catches were, gave a sudden lurch, and the door swung in.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he asked, in abrupt Spanish.

His question was addressed to the man who had so tardily caught the train in Bogota—a swarthy individual in foreign-looking clothes who turned angrily from a small glass, his chin half lathered for shaving and an open razor in his hand.

"*Si*, señor, it is I," the man snapped. "Why do you come in here when you are not invited? Get out, or I shall call for help!"

Billy June was not embarrassed by his greeting. Instead he stepped inside, pulling the door to behind him.

"Now, hombre," he said, quietly, "let us understand one another. You began to follow me at Bogota. You spy on me through that ventilator. Good enough. I walk in and—take your razor away—thus! The razor looks much like a Mexican knife to me. Therefore I confiscate it. Thus. And in the meantime I inform you that, unless you leave this boat at Vocas, you will go into Assuncion dead. Dead! Understand? So that is all. *Buenos dias!*"

Billy opened the door once more, keeping his eyes on the Mexican. Outside he went to the mate and asked when the boat made Vocas. The little river steamer arrived there at six in the evening, he was told. At that time, therefore, Billy was standing by the gangplank. Minutes passed, and June began to be anxious. But just before the gangplank was withdrawn once more his Mexican neighbor came hurriedly from the upper deck, satchel in hand, and ran ashore, throwing Billy a black and threatening look as he went. Billy grinned.

"Well," he said to himself, thoughtfully, "you caught the train out of Bogota all right, and you found me tinkering with a letter to a lady. But now you're on shore safely, and if you stumble in my way again—bango! Next time, my dark-complexioned friend, I won't give you a chance—I'll just come down shooting!"

FROM the moment that Billy June stepped ashore at Valdez, his port of entry for Guatemala City, he felt himself being shadowed. He knew at once that the Mexican spy had gotten word on ahead—probably by this time Mlle. Boyot knew that her letters from the Mexicans in Bogota had been copied. And from his own acquaintance with the tangled and complex spy systems of Latin America Billy felt sure she would meet him with suspicion—in fact he knew that there was small possibility of his getting out of Gautemala without a fight for his life.

And yet, oddly enough, Billy not only was determined to go through with the task he had taken on at Caracas, after leaving General Hawkins, but he was convinced in his own mind that the beautiful girl in blue was innocent of any wrong-doing. Love is blind, of course, and Billy was aware of it. But he was able easily to establish a case that left the opera singer quite outside suspicion. As he figured it an organized movement in South America was furnishing the sinews of war to some Mexican faction.

Unquestionably General Hawkins had been correct in his surmise that certain Central European citizens were involved. Of course the greatest secrecy was essential to the success of their activities, for Billy knew—no one better—that most of the South American republics are friendly with the United States and efficiently zealous in preventing any operations that would give the big sister of republics any more trouble than she already has.

What more natural, then, that Mlle. Boyot, free to travel as she pleased, and probably widely acquainted throughout Southern and Central America, should be used as an unconscious tool of the system? Billy was not afraid that she would find a cryptic message in the letter from Señores

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Reyes and Perez, but he was perfectly certain that some one else would. Once that letter was in her hands it would be a simple matter for a theatrical or musical impresario or promotor in the City of Mexico, for example, to become possessed of them. Then their transmittal to interested parties would be easy—and Mlle. Boyot would never know that she had performed a mission for international filibusterers.

Nevertheless Billy was not at all sure that the lady in question would appreciate his courtesy in steaming open her letter and making a copy of it. So it was with some anxiety that he looked for her as his train pulled in from Valdez to Guatemala City. Behind him two Mexicans, one suave and well dressed, the other a peon traveling third-class, left the same train and lost themselves in the crowd, watching him warily. Billy only felt their presence—he had neither time nor inclination to search them out from the rabble about him.

Mlle. Boyot had wired him at Valdez that she might be able to meet him at the station, but she had been detained, apparently, for she was not there. Billy used silver liberally in injecting life into the clawdling baggage guards, and in half an hour was in a cab, with the heavy steamer trunk inside under his feet, and his own, containing his few pieces of extra clothing and effects, atop.

At the Hotel Guatemala he registered, had the trunks taken to his room under his own eye, and then inquired for Mlle. Boyot. She was not in, but had left word that he might expect her back before dinner. Billy penciled a note, put it in an envelope, and sent it, by a messenger, to the Brazilian Consulate. In half an hour a spruce young attaché appeared with a sturdy Guatemalan.

"What brings you so far North, *Senhor* June?" the attaché cried, shaking hands cordially. "I'm overjoyed to see a familiar face. Nothing but Mexican refugees and these infernal Guatemalan peasants have I seen in months. What's your errand?"

Billy laughed.

"You go so doggone fast, Manuelo!" he drawled, good-naturedly, "that it takes the breath out of a one-cylinder affair like me! Is this the trustworthy citizen I wrote you for?"

The attaché nodded.

"He is a man we use a great deal as a guard. And I stand responsible for him to you."

"Thanks."

Billy turned to the man and addressed him in Spanish.

"Will you place yourself under my orders for as long as I remain in Guatemala City? You will be paid the regular fees and a good-will offering if you give satisfaction. *Esta bueno?*"

"*Si, señor!*"

The man showed his teeth in a grin. The *Americanos* are notoriously extravagant tippers.

"*Si, bueno, señor!*"

"*Gracias, amigo.* We'll go up to my room."

Not until he had established his friend's guard on top of the trunkful that had been turned over to him as ore samples did Billy rejoin the Brazilian attaché; then they had a drink and a confab. Billy talked all around his subject, but managed to draw from the consular representative useful bits of information about trains, boats, people, and Guatemalan conditions that put him in touch with all the changes that had occurred since he himself had been in Guatemala, four years before. Billy spoke casually of being northbound on a secret mission of no consequence, assured his friend that it had nothing to do with the Brazilian Government, and retailed the latest Rio gossip.

"By the way, Manuelo," he said, casually, "there was quite a lot of excitement along the Avenue over the Havana Opera Company when it was there a month ago. Know anything about opera?"

The Brazilian grinned.

"My fondest hope was to have been an opera singer," he said. "But I went into the Governmental service instead and spoiled a good baritone to make a poor diplomat. They tell me that new Polish soprano, Boyot, is making a great hit—you see I keep in touch——"

"She isn't Polish," Billy June interrupted. "She's French—raised and educated in Cuba."

Manuelo looked at June.

"Who told you that?" he asked.

"Oh, I heard it," Billy said, calmly.

"All right, let it be so. But there is another story—that she's Polish, educated in Budapest, and for a long time employed as a sort of confidential secretary by a certain Austrian diplomat. It is also reported that her name is known to all the secret service officers of the world and that the

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English would like particularly to get their hands on her to answer to charges of espionage under the name of Margaret Windler."

Billy June for once had a difficult task in holding himself in control. He buried his nose in his deep glass, then looked at the floor while his fingers traveled to the pockets where he kept a certain cotton tobacco bag and a sheaf of brown papers. He rolled a cigaret slowly, then coughed.

"Never heard that," he said, deliberately, when he had lighted his tobacco. "Don't believe it's true, either But it doesn't make any difference. You knew she was in Guatemala City I suppose."

The Brazilian agent started.

"Here?" he cried.

Billy nodded.

"She can't be! Or if she is—but then, it's possible. These secret police of Guatemala would only turn over and snore louder if she came through and tried to carry away the State buildings! Wonder what her job is now?"

"Grand opera," Billy suggested.

"Not likely. I guess she's deeper than that. However, it's none of my affair. I should like to see her only because they say she's a raving beauty."

"That's what I've heard," Billy answered, non-committedly. "But you hear so many things."

The dangerous subject was closed and shortly the attaché left, assuring Billy June that he had only to ask and everything in the power of the Brazilian Consulate would be done for him. Billy thanked him and turned to considerations of Mlle. Denise Boyot, who might be a woman with other names—for example, Margaret Windler. He found himself hard put to it to frame a new theory now that would keep love as blind as ever. His suspicions were aroused in spite of himself.

And he was not unaware that he had put himself into a compromising position by appearing to abandon the trust given him by General Porter Hawkins in Caracas. He had *not* abandoned that trust—he had abandoned the papers handed him only because he knew that, if they were discovered on him, he could not work with the people he found associated with the lady in blue.

Moreover he had instantly determined that any communications between himself and an English ex-army officer would hamper him. So he had made Hobson's choice—cut himself off absolutely, reckless of how his actions might be interpreted, in order, first to keep in touch with Mlle. Boyot, and secondly to "carry on," as General Hawkins had requested. So far the two missions were going hand in hand. But if the trails should divide . . . .

He was in his room that evening, mulling the thing over when he received his first word from the woman. A messenger, who denied all knowledge of the source of his message, left a note and hurried away. Billy June opened it and read, in stumbling English:

> I have fall under suspicion, *Senhor* June, and my friendship for you is also question. To help me come to 14 Calle——. You would bring that papers if you have it for me, and not fail.
>
> Yore much admiring,
>
> DENISE.

Billy sprang to his feet.

"Here, Seven Sleepers!" he cried, all his suspicions of the woman forgotten, "get on the job and stay awake until I return. *Senhor* Manuelo, at the Brazilian Consulate, says you are to be trusted. Be sure you are! *Adios!*"

The guard was still rubbing his eyes when Billy left, taking six stairs at a jump.

IF THERE were any speed records in Guatemala City it is safe to assume that Billy June fractured them all and hung up a new one in making the run in a taxicab from the Hotel Guatemala to the number on a distant street from which Mlle. Denise Boyot had sent her Macedonian cry. The note indicated to June that he was not expected to carry the place by assault—and this was a fact.

He was admitted on his knock by a Guatemalan woman, probably half-caste, and shown immediately to a dark, low-ceilinged room where it took the trouble-shooter more than a moment to distinguish his lady from the lounge on which she reclined and another moment to determine, first that she was crying, and second that there were two villainous looking Central Americans standing gloomily by and watching her.

"Mam'selle!" Billy exclaimed, his fists doubling. "What is your trouble? Suppose I stick these two pirates outside before you tell me."

She turned to him and put out a hand.

"No, *Senhor* June," she said, in her poor

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'ortuguese, "they are only hired men. hey obey orders. Come here."

Billy glowered at the two hired men, half nclined to waive technicalities and open ire on them on general principles, but ap- roached the couch instead.

"I don't like this," he said to the woman, uskily. "But I will do whatever you say.)nly don't make me angrier with them by rying."

She smiled then, looking singularly beau- iful in the half light.

"I knew that I could depend on you, my riend. I came here to make certain ar- angements for getting on. But I find my- elf under a cloud. The men who put these guards here have gone away—not far—and ire waiting to take me to a *rendezvous* where can straighten out my tangled affairs."

"How can I help, then?" Billy demanded.

"They suspect you. I do not know alto- gether why, but part of it I know. You were given that trunk in Bogota?"

"It is guarded for you in my room at the notel."

"And—any papers, *senhor?*"

"Letters from Señores Reyes and Perez, nanded to me by your amiable friend, Lieutenant Kriege."

He took the letters from an inner pocket, and she seized them with a cry of relief.

"Ah, now I can complete my errand! But in the meantime——"

She looked at June, half timidly.

"Well?" he questioned.

"Will you trust me farther, *senhor?* Everything depends still on you. I tell you that I am under suspicion. If you leave here when I do there will be doubt in the minds of the men who watch me that we play some game against them. I cannot tell you more now. By nine o'clock, in my suite at the hotel I could tell everything—it would be all plain to you."

"You wish to know what I am willing to do to help you?" Billy said, slowly. "I am in the dark, lady. I don't follow this thing at all. But I trust you—and what- ever you say, that I will do."

"You will stay here, with these men—offering them no harm? And wait two hours, until I can quiet suspicion, and meet you at the hotel? Will you do that for me?"

"Sure," Billy gulped. "I'd rather start in by thrashing these highwaymen and tak- ing you away myself. But you are the best judge of this secret business."

She pressed his hand.

"Thanks. You will find your confidence is not misplaced." She turned to one of the men in the room and addressed him in Spanish.

"My friend, Señor June, wishes to stay here for a time, while I go to that place you know of. Is that approved?"

The men whispered together a moment. Then one answered, sulkily:

"*Si*, señorita. But he must attempt no violence and ask no questions."

"I answer for him," Mlle. Boyot replied. "He will stay here until I return, or until you get a message from your employers to release him. Is that well?"

"*Si; poco bueno.*"

Billy was frowning.

"I don't get this comic-opera-bandit stuff at all, mam'selle," he growled, in English. "Give me the word and I'll put these two ex-convicts out of business and we can leave together. The streets of Guatemala aren't safe for any woman alone, I think."

She raised her hand softly and touched his lips.

"Listen, friend," she said, in his ear. "If you lifted a finger against these men their friends in the house would come in here against you and kill us both. But worse than that they would communicate with the men who put them here and my whole work would end in failure."

"Your work?" Billy blurted. "That's the thing, mam'selle—what is your work?"

She hesitated—or seemed to. Then she pulled him close and whispered.

"By accident I discovered secrets of the Mexican Government in Brazil. There are agents of that country all through South America. In Bogota are two of them—Señores Reyes and Perez, friends of Lieutenant Kriege. Now I must go. No harm will come to us if I act quickly, as I will. Before nine o'clock these men will have orders to release you. Will you leave the rest to me—to make me very happy and very secure?"

Billy turned to her, and his lips brushed her hair.

"I will stay," he said.

And in two minutes he heard distant doors close and the wheels of a carriage rattling over the cobblestones from the house.

At ten minutes to nine, after Billy had taken a corner seat near an unbarred win- dow, surreptitiously loosened his faithful

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revolver in its holster, and rolled and consumed innumerable cigarets, a woman came to an inner door and spoke softly in Spanish. At once the two ruffians who had been guarding him rose, bowed low and told him he was free to go. One of them began an apology.

"You can go to the devil!" Billy snapped back in reply, and ran out.

It was several minutes past nine when he reached the hotel. He hurried to the suite where Mlle. Boyot had promised to meet him, and found it empty.

Below in the corridor again, he jerked a question at the clerk.

"Sorry, señor," the man replied, directly, "but Mlle. Denise Boyot paid her bill and left the hotel at eight o'clock this evening.

"Gone?" June gasped.

"Yes, señor. She left orders for forwarding her mail to Havana."

For a moment Billy stood helpless with anger. Then with an impatient gesture he turned and ascended in the lift to his own floor. His door was bolted and his key useless.

Billy was not used to being surrounded by mysteries which completely baffled him. With an angry oath he threw his weight against the door. The second charge did for the lock, the door flew inwards, and Billy went plunging into his own room.

On the floor was his trusty Guatemalan guard, unconscious, and with a nasty wound over his ear, from which blood flowed. The place was a chaos of confusion. His bureau-drawers had been jerked out, his bed tumbled to the floor and his mattress slashed to strips, his clothes had been searched and tossed aside, his own trunk ripped open and its contents strewn broadcast. And the steamer trunk he had brought from Bogota for Mlle. Denise Boyot, and which he was now certain contained at least $50,000 in gold—sinews of war—was gone.

Billy stood a moment, red with mortification and wrath. Then he carried his injured guard to another suite, telephoned his friend, Manuelo of the consulate, to come and get the man, and returned to his own room.

He was certain, now, that his summons and confinement during those two hours had been deliberately planned to get him out of the way. But whether that plan had been made by Mlle. Denise Boyot, or entered into by her, he was not sure. He still longed to believe that the beautiful and fascinating woman was true-blue, but while he searched the rifled room, with all the skill and thoroughness of the trained trailer, he had his doubts. Then, under a brush in his own traveling bag—in a place where he would have been certain to find it sooner or later—he was amazed to discover a card, on which, hastily scrawled, were the words:

Tricked. Matamoras. Trust.

Billy June drew a long breath of relief.

"All right, my friend," he said, contemplatively. "I'm going to believe you once more, and I'm going to find you. And when I do the first thing that we'll have will be a show-down in this little game!"

ON THE night of the twenty-first of February of the present year a certain revolutionary general in the State of Chihuahua, Mexico, concluded a conference of war with something like these words:

"Comrades, the money which I have promised will be in my hands by midnight tomorrow night. I will fulfil my promises to you at that time. And we will attack at daybreak. Is that understood?"

The four men with him nodded, and the conference adjourned.

That daybreak attack was to have been made against Constitutionalist forces and would have been successful. It would have been the first of a series of successful—probably of irresistible—steps leading that certain general to the City of Mexico and supreme control of the republic. Then, according to an agreement also definitely made and completed, there would have followed an attack on the Southern boundaries of the United States of America, intended, first to recover for Mexico her "lost territory" in Texas, Arizona and New Mexico, and second to harass and weaken the United States as a nation.

Beyond all reasonable doubt that attack, planned for the twenty-third of February in Chihuahua would have led to a war between the United States and Mexico—and a war of a serious nature.

But the attack was never made. And the reason had to do with the gold, with which that certain revolutionist general confidently expected to satisfy the four quarrel-

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some bandit leaders behind him. It had been raised in South America by men, not interested in Mexico, but distinctly interested in harassing the United States of America. It had been forwarded by trusted agents. The general had no suspicion that it would not arrive. *But it did not arrive.*

Perhaps the men most interested never knew why. But if they had followed Billy June, through a week of perils and baffling search, they would have found out, for the gold that general expected was the gold Billy June brought from Bogota and lost in Guatemala City. They would have followed him at last to a suite of rooms in a dirty and ill-favored water-front hotel in the Mexican port of Matamoras, and would have arrived there on the very night on which the general and his bandit allies had their last conference—the night of the twenty-first of June.

And if they had followed they would have walked in behind Billy June unannounced, and confronted in that room two persons—one a crafty and evil-faced European, called Schmidt—the other, Mlle. Denise Boyot, late of the Havana Opera Company.

As Billy entered, the man, Schmidt, stumbled to his feet with an oath and reached into his big coat pocket. But he did not draw out his hand. Billy June's long black-barreled revolver was on him.

"Stand still, swine!" Billy snapped, in English. "I'm tired and cranky, and I'm not going to palaver with your kind—not any!"

Before Schmidt could put up his arms Billy had struck him—hard and sure—and the man had dropped like a polled steer. In another breath handcuffs secured him to a chair and there was a handkerchief gag in his mouth. Then Billy June turned the trussed and panting fat man face to the wall, and swung about.

"Now, Miss Windler," he said, in a trained voice, "I guess your play-acting is over. We've come to the time for showing our cards."

Even June was surprised to see that she did not turn color nor start. She only smiled, very frankly.

"I think you're right, Mr. June," she replied. "Shall I call you, or do you call me?"

Billy gulped. She was amazingly deep, or else a consummate actress, he thought, watching her openly.

"I guess it's your first play," he said.

The girl nodded.

"Very well. What are the stakes?"

Billy's impatience got the better of him.

"Why, I'll tell you about that, lady," he broke out, abruptly. "I've played my life for six weeks against your squareness. I've played my reputation with South American people who have been my friends and who've trusted me, against your word. I've played a trunkful of gold belonging to enemies of my country against your wishes and requests. And right now, unless I'm mistaken, I'm playing life and death again. I was followed here by two men, and they looked like Mexicans who had others at their call. When you speak of stakes, I guess I'm betting about all I've got."

"You are, Mr. June," the astonishing woman cried out, on this. "You have played all the things you speak of, and more that you don't know of. You have played like a gentleman. And so far I've been gambling without much that you could win. I don't expect you to trust me again. But now, whether you will believe me or not and whether you will trust me or not, I intend to lay all the cards I hold on the table."

Billy was searching her eyes. He made his living—indeed had kept his life—for years by appraising people and reckoning them as for or against him on sight. Now he was puzzled.

"Well," he said, slowly, "it has looked lately as though I couldn't trust you or believe you either, lady. But I'm game to give you another play. I tell you one thing, though—neither one of us goes out of here until I find out whose hand is high!"

The girl shuddered, involuntarily, and turned her face away.

"My trouble is, Mr. June, that my cards are not all here. And so, for part of them, you may have to take my word—if they don't arrive."

"Are you threatening, Miss Windler?" he asked, coolly.

"No," she cried. "No, not that! I am threatened, myself. My safety may depend on the turn of a hand. And it's important for me to make you believe that what I say is true."

He studied her carefully, but she stood waiting, frankly facing him.

"What's your first card?" he asked evenly.

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She answered him promptly.

"I am Margaret Windler, as you have guessed. I am employed in what is called diplomatic service—secret service. I am neither French, nor Cuban, nor English—but American. What is your first card?"

Billy thought a moment. He had been tricked before. Finally he said:

"I started from the hotel, the day I met you in Caracas—remember, as you were leaving in your car?—to follow trails that would have led me here, and probably by way of Kriege and Reyes and Perez and your steamer trunk of gold. I had papers and maps and passports—and money. I wanted to find out why you were hooked up with Kriege, for instance. So when you introduced me to him and asked me to go to Bogota for you, I threw my papers and traveler's checks on the quay. I was afraid Kriege would find them on me. He searched my clothes the next night, as it turned out. So I searched his. And found out who he was."

The girl nodded.

"I thought I knew what you would do," she said, cryptically. "Is it my play?"

"Looks that way."

She was more ready than he had been. She answered again without hesitation.

"I am not a professional opera singer—that only served an end for me. I was in South America on another mission, when I stumbled, by accident, into Kriege and his plot. I joined him, for purposes that I had. I asked you to get that trunk for me in Bogota, and in Guatemala City I was with the men who stole it from your room, although I had nothing to do with searching your personal affairs. While they were at that—that outrage—I left you a clue by which you could follow, for I knew then that I would be hurried out of Guatemala City some time that evening. I hoped you would find me. And that is my second card."

"Did you deliberately trick me in Guatemala City, by leaving me in that room under guard?"

"Yes. I had to play the game, or we would both of us have been endangered."

"Did you know that if it had not been for that trick, I should have prevented your bringing the trunk on into Mexico?"

"Of course," the girl answered, without a change in her tone. "Because I was sure you knew what the trunk contained—or that you guessed."

"Then what in the name of mercy did you—"

Billy June broke off suddenly. He was not going to force her hand.

She smiled, rather feebly.

"It's your next card, Mr. Billy June."

"I made a copy of that cipher letter sent you from Bogota," he answered. "The cipher had me puzzled for a while; then I worked out a stencil and read it. So I know what plans are hatching in a certain capital in Europe and going forward in Mexico today—and day after tomorrow!" He added the last significantly, thinking of the contemplated attack on Constitutional forces by a certain *revollo* chieftain.

Margaret Windler nodded.

"The man you drove off the boat above Assuncion sent word of that to me," she said. "So we are not playing new cards altogether, you and I."

"I see," Billy said, shortly. "Your play!"

The girl's eyes fell. "I told you that all my cards weren't here," she began, and stopped. There came to them the sound of a door closed, the hurried rush of feet down the adobe passageway, and a knock.

Margaret Windler clutched Billy June's sleeve.

"I play my third card," she whispered, tensely. "This man must not leave Matamoras tonight."

Billy looked into her eyes, searchingly, and wavered. But she was telling the truth with those eyes.

"I'm trusting you," he said, abruptly. "Call him in."

He sprang to one side, noiseless and swift as a panther.

"*Entrez*, monsieur," the girl cried, clearly, and the door swung open.

BILLY JUNE had counted on surprising the newcomer, but either because the delay had alarmed him, or because he feared a trap, the man who entered did so only after making a quick appraisal of the room. He saw June. Instantly he whipped out a revolver, hung military fashion on his right hip.

"You are not alone," he exclaimed, in Spanish, addressing the woman. "What does this man do here?"

The girl half rose, smiling.

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"This is my friend, Mr. June, of Rio, Major Vena," she answered, lightly. "You are suspicious?"

"I must be," the Mexican answered, uneasily. "Does he leave now—your friend, Señor June?"

Billy June answered, his arms crossed, his shoulders resting against the wall behind him.

"Don't hurry me, Major Vena. Drop in and sit down."

"No, señor. I have but little time. I must ask you to go."

Billy hunched his shoulders and walked forward, his hands at his sides. The Mexican watched him narrowly, but his hand relaxed and his revolver dropped a few inches. Billy June made to reach for his hat, lying on a chair. But instead he lashed out, as a cat strikes, and the visitor's gun went smashing to a corner.

"*Caramba!*" the man cried, furiously, and grappled with June.

Margaret Windler ran around the two who were struggling tensely, and closed the door. With the tail of his eye June saw this, and realized that the Mexican must be kept quiet and subdued quietly. He wrenched an arm free and struck twice, hard. With a choking cry, that could not have been heard through the thick walls of the place, Major Vena went limp and fell to the floor. Billy June straightened up and wiped his forehead.

"We'll get quite a collection if this keeps up," he said, comically, and Margaret Windler laughed hysterically as June hastily gagged and bound his captive.

"Put him here," she said, pulling aside a window curtain. June stowed his helpless prisoner in the niche below the window. Then he turned to the girl.

"That was your third card," he prompted. "But I don't savvy it."

The girl sat down, weakly.

"He came for the money—for the money in that trunk," she answered.

Billy June's heart leaped. He had to hold himself carefully, for he remembered how he had been tricked before, but there seemed reason to believe, at last, what he most wanted to believe. Vena had come for the gold that was to go to the revolutionist general in Chihuahua. And she had played, as her third card, the capture of the messenger. Either the woman was at a deep game, or else she was trying now to aid Billy June's. He fumbled a cigaret awkwardly.

"It's my play," he said. "I'm beginning to think that you're dealing square—this time."

The girl's face brightened.

"I am, Mr. June," she said, sincerely. "I have tricked you before, but it was because I had to. Go on."

"I'm homesick for the States," June said then, slowly. "I've been in South America for twelve years and I want to see the stars and stripes floating from something besides a consular office or the peak of a cruiser in the harbor at Rio or Para. I think perhaps I could be useful at home. When I left Caracas I thought there might be a chance of my getting home, and I wanted to take something definite with me. I wanted to do my share toward getting the States prepared.

"Then I found you and Kriege and Reyes and Perez and your trunkful of gold. If it hadn't been for you I should have shipped that trunk to Washington, and the State Department would have held it until called for by the owners. I don't think they would have called—do you?"

She smiled wanly.

"No," she said.

"All right. It was in Guatemala City that I first heard that you were supposed to be a spy, that your name was Margaret Windler, and that you were in bad with the English Government. But even after that I trusted you, and you went to my rooms and took that trunk. You said a little while ago that you hoped I would find you. My fourth card is a question—why did you trick me there?"

The girl flushed.

"I hated it," she said. "But I had miscalculated sailings and after I left you I found I had to go at once in order to meet these two men here and avoid arousing suspicion. If you had followed me then you would have made it impossible for me to do what I wanted to do, and what I succeeded in doing."

"What was that?" Billy blurted, impatiently.

"It is my fourth card," she answered, with a catch in her voice. "This."

She took from her waist a shipping receipt, dated Guatemala City, and carrying the information that Mlle. Denise Boyot had consigned to Washington, D. C., U. S.

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A., one trunk, containing ore samples. Billy stared.

"Not *that* trunk?" he exclaimed.

She nodded.

"I shipped it from Guatemala City that night, within a few minutes after it was taken from your room. And I brought on here a duplicate trunk filled with old iron. Major Vena could not have taken back the gold he came for. But he might have found me out—and then——"

Billy June shuddered. He took a knife from his pocket and ripped open his coat lapel, disclosing the quill and the roll it held.

"Did you know the cipher for reading this?" he asked.

She glanced at the sheets in carbon.

"Yes," she answered." I sent the original of that to Washington, too."

Billy June jumped to his feet, his head whirling.

"Who are you?" he demanded, abruptly. "What Government are you working for? You are an American——"

"Yes," she interrupted, with lowered eyes, "I am an American. I am working out of Washington for a man who had heard of you and wants your services. But he desired to find out what you could do. And he sent me to learn. I have had a difficult task, for by accident I fell in with Kriege and joined him in his schemes. You see that I couldn't tell how far to take you in—I relied on your courage and cleverness to come through at the critical moments. And you did—wonderfully! That is my last card, Mr. June—you are wanted in Washington—at home."

She would not look at him yet. Billy June crossed to her, slowly, drinking in her beauty, amazed at this revelation of her superhuman resourcefulness, courage, and ability. He wanted to shake her hand, to apologize to her, to thank her, to kneel at her feet, if he could, and let her know how humble he felt now that he understood the whole tangled affair.

He could telegraph General Hawkins, the perturbed and peppery Englishman, at last, that he had not played false to his commission. He could re-establish himself with his friends. He could hasten home to a country he loved—and that needed and wanted him. His hand shook when he held it out to her and his voice shook when he spoke, at last, with painful slowness.

"The game is over, Miss Windler," he said. "I can't say anything more. Some day perhaps——"

The girl looked up at him, quizzically, appealingly, half-humorous and half-frightened.

"You haven't played your last card," she said in a low voice.

"I—can't," Billy June replied, his voice failing him.

She touched his hand with soft fingers—not as she had touched it when she had been playing the part of Mlle. Boyot, the opera singer, but as a plain American girl—with sympathy and friendliness and human understanding in the touch.

"Why not, Billy June?" she asked, gently. "Play it—and see who wins."

Suddenly he clutched her shoulder and almost roughly pulled her to her feet. Lost in a mad rush of passion and tenderness he bent to her and blurted:

"My last card—Margaret? It is that I love you."

Then, half frightened—he, the trouble-shooter, who feared nothing that walked!—he dropped his hands to his sides. She put both hers on his arms and gently slipped them up until her palms met at his throat.

"I thought you did, Billy," she said. "I *hoped* you did. And I guess—" her voice broke now—"I guess you win!"

They went out unchallenged, and Billy June left her at her own hotel while he hurried away to start messages to Edmund Doag and to General Hawkins—and to his little mother, in the peach and prune orchards of Santa Clara. The next day they sailed, and the police later found and released from a disordered room in a dirty water-front lodging house, two weary and incoherent prisoners, one of whom dragged himself into a car and started for a certain encampment in Chihuahua—*without* the sinews of war!

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STRENGTH OF THE GENTLE

by HAROLD TITUS

Author of "An Event," "Appreciating Peter," etc.

EVER since dawn, when they left Cross Village, Karl had walked or trotted ahead, the box of antitoxin tight under his arm. And almost every step of the way big George Holvic had held his little gray eyes on the boy's buoyant shoulders. When, on rare occasions, he had removed them it had been to look furtively at landmarks and gage their progress: as when Waugoshance emerged from the gray of early morning before them or when Skillagalee lighthouse dwindled to a luminous sliver in the curtain of murk to the southeast.

At first, when they made over the slippery casting that night's frost had put on Lake Michigan's rotting ice, the gaze had been cryptically baleful—as it had been for months. Then, when the wind whipped out of the east and steadied to a gale and sucked up the frost, making the ice greeny-black, covered with pools of riffling water, treacherous to look upon, dangerous to walk upon, fear had crept into his eyes.

And now, as Holvig stood spread-legged, menacing, confronting the alarmed but steady query from Karl's gentle blue eyes his look was eloquent of jealousy, of outraged pride, of hate. And fear too. Something volcanic, repressed and ominous, was about him, discounting Karl's momentary upperhandedness.

"Don't be a fool!" he repeated, flinging an arm northward in gesture. "It's movin'; we can't make it!"

Karl looked again as bidden at the low-lying rib of phosphorescent white ice crushing up before the pressure of the wind. Then, smiling queerly, he replied:

"We can't do anything else but go on. It may not move much. The doctor said every hour might mean a life——"

Holvig cut him short with a grunt of impatience.

"What good 'll it do them if we drown?"

His voice vibrated, boding no good for the repression he exerted.

Karl shrugged his shoulders. He still smiled, ignorant of danger.

"As much good as if we sit safe and wait, anyhow. Come, George, don't be afraid," with the suggestion of a taunt.

"Afraid!" the man shouted thickly, advancing a step. "I ain't afraid, but I ain't a fool. Go on if you want. I'm goin' to Hog and wait," with a nod toward the not far distant island.

Karl's smile died. A strange glint of temper showed in his eyes.

"With two of us, this—" tapping the box —"has a chance of getting across; with one, just a half a chance. If I should make it on that half chance should I tell them you, George, were waiting, thinking more of your own skin than of their lives? Would you want the people home to know that?"

Holvig swayed, gray face flooding with color. He opened and shut his hands and not finding words, his wrath, his fear, threatened the reason which had held him

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in check. And Karl, not knowing men, believing that his imputations were having their designed effect, went on—

"Would you want them all, even Helga, to know——"

He broke off, for on mention of the girl's name Holvig's rage overflowed and, yelling an oath, he charged.

A flash of distress flickered on the lad's face. He had tried to sting the man beyond fear; he had goaded him only to such action, and he was appalled by the sudden looming of disaster.

"Don't, George!" he shot out, and wheeled to be away from danger.

He miscalculated and the other bore him down into the slush.

"Think of *them*, Geo—" Karl entreated as a fist mashed into his mouth and a knee ground his belly to stop words with a strangling gulp.

He could not expect mercy. He fought back vaguely against the superior strength. Fingers grappled for his throat; he set his teeth in the wrist which pressed against them and bit and clung as George yanked to break the hold. While his jaws held he fumbled at the buttons of his reefer, trying to open the heavy garment.

Then Holvig, schooled in the fighting of the North, jerked his wrist free and clamped his fingers about Karl's ears and shoved his thumbs into the boy's blue eyes—and gouged.

The lad's body quivered as he held back his cry of pain. But it came finally, and convulsions of effort. The man astride him rolled his eyeballs mercilessly.

"Afraid, am I?" Holvig panted. "Tell 'em I'm afraid, will you? Tell Helga——"

Karl strove to turn his head, but the grip on his ears held it steady to the torture. He churned the ice with his feet. He shouted, not for mercy, but for strength. And all the time he tore at his jacket buttons. Holvig bared his teeth and even while his thumbs gouged he lifted Karl's head and banged it against the ice, again and again.

Then, by some incredible chance of leverage, he was on his side and the lad was free. Choking a word of triumph Karl yanked his jacket open, mounting to his knee, holding his head back to see through the closing lids and as George gathered for another rush, he pulled out a heavy, dull-barreled revolver.

"Stay back!" swaying to his feet. "I'll kill you if you move!"

Unconsciously George's hands had elevated themselves and, knees sagged, bending backward from the hips, he poised, dumfounded. Karl breathed in sputters, his eyebrows strained upward to hold the inflamed lids open. The figure of big Holvig became less distinct with each moment. He was going blind—and the stricken island fishing-village miles yonder.

"Turn around," he said weakly and moved his revolver with significance.

Holvig obeyed and on weak legs moved to him.

"Don't move!" he threatened. "Put your hands higher—higher! Stand there."

He unwound his long scarf. George moved his head nervously.

"Still! If you turn 'round I'll shoot!"

He knotted the end of his scarf in the belt of the other's mackinaw. He wound the other about his left wrist.

"Pick up the box," he said, and prodded with the gun.

They moved, Karl clinging to the scarf, weapon close against the other's body. George stopped, straightened, and said unsteadily—

"Well?"

Karl stood still an instant, breathing noisily.

"Straight for Petit Blanc," he answered, a grit in his voice. "I can't see far, but I can see you. The wind's in my ear; I'll know if you circle. If you turn on me, I'll shoot you; if you leave the course, I'll shoot you. Now—run!"

"But—it's movin'! I can see it spread!"

"Run—now——"

And it was not so much of the jab of the gun muzzle in his back as the iron in the boy's voice which set them moving, forward, faster, until they trotted, the one leading, horror in his face; the other trailing at twenty inches, lying that he could see from the places where his blue eyes had been.

SUCH was the crisis that made a potential killer of gentle Karl. Always, he had been so shy and quiet that he was an outcast on Petit Blanc, but now he dominated the dominant personality of the island with the threat of death.

But his nature alone set Karl apart. It, with his slender body, delicate hands and features, were influences, but the determining

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factor was the accident of birth which, when rare occasion demanded a surname, made him go as Karl Eoslöve—the name of his mother's mother. For Freja Eoslöve had gone to work in a Charlevoix hotel and had returned to hide with her grim mother; then to die, leaving her boy. The grandparent shut herself and the child apart, covering her humiliation by a fierce defiance. This seclusion developed in Karl an inherent sense of a difference from others and the occasional covert taunts of those who should have been his mates were not necessary to make him know that the village did not regard him quite as it did most children.

His origin would have been overlooked in time had he been as other boys, but circumstances drove him back upon himself. He learned to do without human associates, making friends with the woods life and later through the haphazard schooling, becoming acquainted with books. He grew mentally alert, reaching out until his interests were quite apart from those common to Petit Blanc.

Karl did not take to the fishing and for a living he turned to raising vegetables and chickens on a clearing in the forest. A few Winters later his rigid grandmother died, leaving him wholly alone, seen but seldom.

The boy, past twenty, might never have borne a closer relationship to the island life had not Helga Jensen returned. Helga was the youngest daughter of Jens, the patriarch. Since her little-girlhood she had lived with an aunt in Traverse City from whence came great tales of her, all spread with elaborate detail by her proud father. She came back to Petit Blanc to spend the summer; later, urged by mothers, to stay and teach the school.

Twenty-two, clear-eyed, full-lipped, the vigor of Danish forebears combined with keen intelligence; competent and sweetly gentle, not at all a product of a familiar environment, the old wives did not understand her; she was unlike their girls in so many ways that they were at first somewhat in awe of Helga. But children played about the Jensen house until old Jens became irritable and shooed them away.

Now, Karl and Helga had gone to school together as children, but on her return no one ever thought to talk to her about the lad and she did not see him, for it was the busy season with bees and growing things. But one afternoon, strolling alone, she came to his clearing and discovered Karl. For the first time the boy found a native interested in him, eager to talk to him about himself. He was overwhelmed by it. He became powerless to hold his gaze elsewhere than on the girl, his voice and his wits forsook him as he walked through the woods with her toward the village.

And when, flushed and confused, he left her by the lilac bushes at her gate, he hurried away abruptly, feeling that life had changed so completely that he must be alone to think, to adjust himself. He was no longer a thing apart; he had found communion with another human—and a beautiful girl. For the first time he knew that he had been starving for friendship—and she had asked him to come back.

She had asked him to come back! It was a song in his heart and he broke into a run, going faster, tiring legs and lungs as he rushed through the forest, as all boys must when they are wildly glad. He flung himself into the grass by his tiny house and clutched handfuls of its tightly. She had asked him to come back!

Wonderful weeks followed. Wonderful for Karl, for Helga, for Petit Blanc. The crones and the young girls had a fresh bit to mull, for Karl, the queer, had come close to the village life, brought so by Helga. And a little later Freja Eoslöve's bastard ate at the table of Jens Jensen! The bit was mouthed in a score of homes. Petit Blanc watched closely, watched closely.

Karl became a frequent visitor in the village and Helga helped beat the path to his clearing. They lined renegade bees that had swarmed from his hives and found them after hours searching in a hollow tree and Karl surmised vast quantities of honey there, which he refused to take, saying he had enough honey and that the escaped bees needed it for their contentment.

He showed her where he had rigged a big cage of brush and wire by a spring in a thicket and raised and kept prisoners a family of partridge.

"I read in a book that it couldn't be done," he explained, as a motive. "I knew it could. I transplanted that thornapple and the pin cherries. I planted the pokeweed and the clover, too. I let leaves blow in to make it seem natural. Then I caught the chicks and put them here."

"You tamed them, then!"

He shook his head.

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"Nothing can gentle them. I could keep them alive but they never would be my friends. So I tore down the wire.

"My arbutus, though,"—pride in his voice—"it grew. In the book, too, it said trailing arbutus couldn't be tamed. I did it. I tried many ways. I cut the flowers from one plant in the Spring, before they made seeds; then I moved it in the Fall. That Winter I kept it warm in my kitchen. I set it out when the snow went."

He showed her, and riffled the leaves with a show of affectionate feeling. He looked up and met Helga's surprising gaze. The parted lips, the new eagerness, broke through his absorption in those simple achievements which he loved and confused him so that he hastened to take refuge in telling her of the ring-necked pheasant eggs that the lawyer, who lived Summers in the big cottage on the bluff, had brought him.

"A hen hatched them, but when their second feathers came they ran into the woods and became wild. Not too wild!" he laughed. "They came back, and an old lady Wyandotte hatched a rooster that was half her kind, half pheasant. He's in the woods three years now, and yet thinking he can crow with his pheasant's throat. He sounds like a tiny fog whistle—quite sick!"

His mirth made him choke.

So they drew close to one another and as this was accomplished their relationship changed constantly. Karl came to lie awake nights, strangely disturbed. He experienced new emotions when he worked in his potato patch. At times it seemed as if the urges in him would bring physical hurt and then he would look up at the sky or into the woods and tears would come into his helpless eyes. Thereafter he would assault his task with a fury that set him panting and dripping.

He was overpowered by love. Daily he was in a torment of indecision, urged on by his passion, held back by his reticence. That shortcoming, though, was passing before the influence of the girl. She respected him and that regard made him grow stronger, braver, retaining all his gentleness but expanding until he dared covet her.

AND THEN, to influence him again, came another to Petit Blanc: George Holvig. He had been gone a decade, working in Minneapolis. He was thirty, wore white collars and had come back to the village to dominate. He established a store and made Petit Blanc independent of St. James, a dozen miles to the southward on Beaver Island. He said he was getting a post-office and that he was going to boom the place; and explained what that meant.

George was rich, comparatively; business wise, comparatively; born to lead, to an extent, and the simple people looked up to him, going to him with problems and taking advice that amounted to orders. His prestige grew tremendously. He had his own way in every undertaking.

And then, after the first weeks, he undertook to woo Helga Jensen. That caused a thrill among the women and heads went close together. Over Helga's intimacy with Karl they had always been skeptical; now they chattered spontaneous approval. George was smart. He could give Helga a fine house. All would be well. Much better than her dallying with Karl, who was queer and nameless. Much, much better!

George cultivated Jens and sat many hours in his house smoking and telling of his triumphs. But Jens, listening open-mouthed, was only his foil for from time to time, in the midst of some tale of self-glorification George would shoot an inquiring look at Helga, who was never actually included in these conversations, who watched and listened with a manner that puzzled Holvig, which made him uneasy.

"He is a great man, Helga," Jens would say when they were alone. "Smart! He will become greater."

One of these evenings Karl came and the confident volubility of George struck him dumb. Too, old Jens who before had been glad to welcome him as Helga's visitor now scowled at him fiercely, making the boy know that he was not wanted. Helga, flushed and uneasy, frightened him also, as she strove unsuccessfully to make him talk. He returned home troubled. The next time he went to the village store George beckoned him curtly to the rear.

"Say kid," he said belligerently, "you better quit hangin' around Jensen's. It don't do a girl no good to have you with her. Helga was sorry for you; that's why she got friendly with you. But she and I are going to get married when we get around to it."

Karl stumbled homeward, life tumbling about him in confusion. Hours afterward his lips framed the words which he repeated again and again during ensuing days—

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"I should have known better—and not been a fool—to hope——"

Because he had known love, now he could know bitterness. For a brief span his retiring confidence had been awakened. Rebuff from pugnacious George shattered his assurance, dissipated his dream of possession, stripped him of the delights of Helga's friendship; it ruined even the contentment that had been his before Helga came to Petit Blanc. He no longer sang about his work. His face was troubled and he sat hours brooding, heedless of tasks. His gentleness acquired a cast of sadness.

Karl shunned the village, going there only when necessary. Once, on a Sunday, he saw George rowing with Helga, gay suspenders, white shirt, cigar, bellicose joviality; the girl was laughing—until she saw Karl on shore. Then she averted her face.

Other things he discovered: George was building a house, the best in the village, paint and plaster and porch in liberal proportions. The people took it for granted that he had won Helga, and they were glad. The boy knew they watched him, too, for he felt the prying eyes; he knew they talked about him also, for he heard the whispers, which sharpened his natural shyness.

He seldom spoke to Helga after Holvig's warning and when he did their few words were scarcely coherent, for mere sight of her would put him in a sweat, make him forget everything but that old sense of hopeless confusion, seasoned now with the gall of disappointment. Therefore he strove to avoid her, going out of his way to make a meeting impossible or hurrying by with head down, pretending not to notice her.

Once she insisted. This was on the edge of the village and when he encountered her Karl was unexplainably convinced that she had waylaid him.

"Karl, there's something I must tell you." she said abruptly, the effort required for self-command evidenced by the tight set of her mouth. "George—he is—well, unreasonable. He—I am afraid he might, lose his temper and hurt you——"

Stung, the boy broke in:

"Why should he hurt me? I am doing as you would have me do!"

Then with a self-conscious sway of shoulders he strode past her into the woods; he did not look back, so he could not see the miserable hurt in her face. But thereafter he noticed that every time he was in sight of Holvig the man's eyes followed him with a glitter, watching Karl balefully even while he talked to others. The boy wondered. Later he became uneasy. The constancy of that stare boded no good.

Autumn, Karl's potatoes ripened. Holvig bought the crop and then boasted how he had outbargained the boy. He repeated this gloatingly, wanting all to know that he was smarter than Karl. The simple people nodded their heads. Helga would have made a many-sided mistake, letting Karl woo her further.

After this Karl caught a changed gleam in Holvig's gaze. It was triumph. And then it disappeared, was replaced by the old malevolent quality—intensified. He thought much of Helga's warning, trying to relate it to George's close, strange watching.

Why? What did it mean?

Winter came and Holvig's new house was complete, but empty. Helga taught school and old Jens said that by Spring they should see what they should see and laughed with Holvig, who was his great friend; at times, though, a flicker of uncertainty, a sort of embarrassment, came into the old man's face when he jested so. Karl heard what he was saying and often afterward repeated to himself—

"They shall see what they shall see!"

Then he walked faster; worked harder.

Holvig dragged furniture across the ice on a sleigh. Soon people would see what they should see, he laughed. And once when he made that boast Karl heard, started under its sting and looked to see George's eyes on him, a threatening laugh in them, while the man licked his lips. Going home, he thought he heard another following; he stopped and listened a long time, then decided his ears had played pranks on him.

Spring approached. Drifts were wiped from the ice, snow in the woods settled, school would soon be out, Helga free, a wedding, surely.

THEN sickness. Alex Welt, who married Hans Mörk's girl, returned from the mainland with fever. The fifth day he died. Old Jens, in the absence of a pastor, exercised the power of the keys and buried him. Next day the oldest Welt boy was sick; also two children from Helga's school. A man was sent to catch the mail-carrier and get the doctor from the mainland.

The doctor arrived, driving a dog-team

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across ice that would no longer hold a horse. His sick numbered seven. He looked at them, called the men to Holvig's store and shaking his thermometer, said:

"You have diphtheria here. Most of you are likely to come down with it any hour. It's going to be a tough fight; you must forget everything else but it.

"I'm not prepared for so many. I must have two of the healthiest of you to send back after a lot of antitoxin. I must have it in a hurry. Besides, the ice is weak and may not last.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Now, then!"

He took temperatures, examined throats and pulses. The men were silent—the women, too, who crowded the doorway. Finally Holvig and Karl were selected; the man because he was big and strong, the boy because he had not been near the sick.

"We start tomorrow?" George asked, glancing at Karl rather eagerly in spite of the worry in his brows.

"We start now," the doctor said bluntly. "With this ice there isn't a minute to lose. I'll write a note to my wife. All you'll have to do will be bring back what she gives you. Bring it back, and remember that maybe every hour you are gone after tomorrow means a life.

"There's no one dependent on you?"

He looked at the two and the group stared at the three.

The boy said—

"No, nobody," with a tremor.

And some one snickered.

George eyed Karl again, the eagerness about him mounting, and swaggered.

"Come on, kid; I ain't afraid!"

But no one had supposed he was afraid.

The group parted for them and unexpectedly they faced the white, fearful Helga.

She looked into George's face with a mixture of pleading and dismay, then spoke rapidly to Karl—but not looking at him.

"There's no time to lose," she said. "George must change his clothes; you are ready. Come to my house and I'll fix a pail of food for you both—to carry."

She swallowed with an effort, eyes still on Holvig's face. He did not meet them. He was uneasy, pale; eyes burning. Mutely Karl followed her.

Saying little, the group watched the departure, standing on shore, seeing the men dwindle to dots, long afternoon shadows pointing eastward. Then the people moved and as they went Lars Larsen's old mother said to her daughter-in-law, Sigrid:

"Education! It spoils girls!" and laughed irritably. "About Helga one can tell nothing. Trouble, trouble! It's in her face.

"Maybe she's played the boy off, waiting to see if her heart would open to the big one. Maybe it hasn't—hasn't. We do not know though we chatter about them like birds."

She mummed her words; then burst out:

"And likely she knows she's made the boy sick of life, and likely she's found she does care for him, and likely she's afraid now he'll come back a hero. What would she do then with her pride and her education? Eh! She's in a mess, she is. So!

"Did you see how he walked? Like on air? With sun in his eyes? He's never been so before! This errand, it has put bolder blood in his veins."

And alone on the wharf, old Jens looked into the sky and muttered:

"A hot sky! If it blows after another day's heat—God pity them!"

GOD PITY them, indeed! George, the driven, and Karl the blind. They had waited a day in Cross Village for response to the telephoning. During the next night a man drove overland with the precious package. From the east, this hurricane; beneath their feet this ice, pitted by the finger-marks of Spring. And the fear of the one had taken the sight of the other and, not seeing, Karl playing fear against fear that he might drive on toward the island hidden in the thick murk.

With the wind in his ear and hell in his eyes the boy steadied himself to the ordeal: eight miles of ice, every step a potential drowning, and torment badgering his concentration on the man who led him.

Before they had gone a hundred yards George's outline had dissolved into the pinkish void through which Karl strove to see. Bruised lids had closed over eyeballs that burned and throbbed, sending trickles of tears oozing out, shooting pains back into his head. But again he lied:

"I can see you, George Holvig. If you turn——"

He twitched at the scarf and heard the man mumble.

Their gaits were unnatural. George jogged with a reluctant shuffle. Karl ran awkwardly, stepping high as the blind will,

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mouth open, partly in excitement, partly in pain. So, for many minutes the gale ripping at them, making them lean against it; and the boy it was as working in a tread mill. Up and down, slosh, slip, stumble, unable to see himself move, unable to judge progress, feeling his efforts impotent, thinking the man before him might be exerting trickery, just marking time, not running for the island, fooling him. . . .

This first doubt wore away. Karl's sense of progress, of mastery, developed. His stomach ached from his shallow breathing. He relaxed, and the pain from his eyes became more insistent. It crept through into the back of his neck, down to a point just above the shoulder blades and lodged there, a knot of outraged nerves.

He was careful to hold his head just so, to keep the wind at the same angle in his ear, but when he could hear nothing else and after a long debate changed position to listen, he heard George sobbing as he breathed. He realized, then, that he also was gasping. But he did not think of rest, though the slush seemed to be deepening with each stride.

He wondered if men lost their minds from pain. The place in his neck stung and burned. Shortly the pain seemed to be seeping down his spine.

He ceased stepping so high; not because he had accustomed himself to running without eyes, but because his legs were numbing with effort—and ache. He realized that George was talking—

"Stop— got to— can't——"

He did stop, abruptly. Karl, not understanding, fell against him. George leaped forward with a cry, almost jerking the boy from his feet.

"Right!" Karl gasped. "Walk—I can see you—if you turn——"

He knew, though, that he had not been just going up and down, that he had been going forward rapidly, for he had broken his lip against the back of Holvig's head as he ran into him. There was comfort in that assurance. However, as they walked, he realized the toll of strength the fight had taken, the first stretch of running had taken, the pain was taking.

His knees were uncertain, feet heavy, lungs raw from excited breathing. And a fearful question came to him: What if they should not hold out? What if they should not beat the ice?

The question swirled in his reeling mind and when the panic had passed he found himself running, feet *wooshing* through the slush in short, heavy strides. The footing drained strength. The pain had crept down his spine to the hips and spread into the slipping joints. They burned. His thighs grew drugged with it and throbbed dully. He shook his head to drive off a sudden slump of helplessness. And then, with a jerk, set it at a fresh angle.

A new sound was in the air; or in his buzzing head. A humming, low, irregular. It was not the wind. Something else. He wondered, rather giddily.

They walked, pain making Karl stoop forward, making his face that heavy. They trotted, with the killing sense of a treadmill's futility. Walked again. The boy caught himself reeling after that reprieve and knew that George must know of his wobbling legs, for it was the pull of the scarf that kept him up. Fear that he might fall and be at Holvig's mercy sent fresh virility through his sore body. The walk, walk, walking, step so childishly short, it seemed; and nothing to tell him the result of his effort. Then George said in a choking voice—

"Karl."

"Run!"

The *woosh-wooshing* of feet. The wind in his ear. Fear in his breast.

"Karl!" fright in the tone.

"If you turn——"

"It's movin', Karl! It's comin' toward us, fast—God, Karl, I can *hear* it!"

The big one's voice was shrill. Karl took up the slack in the scarf and poked the gun against George's back.

"Keep going!" he panted.

"Can't you hear?" the other cried, voice stronger; still he ran, not daring even to turn his head over his shoulder. "Can't you hear? We're gone if we keep on. We can turn back and make it!"

Truth? A ruse? A lie? Or just fear? In a fury of contempt for a man he could not trust, then Karl struggled for words; in a moment of hopelessness he felt his throat swell at thought of Petit Blanc—waiting.

"Run!" he gasped. If you turn back—"

The rant of his own voice startled him to a moment of clear thinking and then he knew that pain was making him heedless of fatigue. He ran nimbly. But not so, George. His stride grew ragged. He floundered, and Karl stepped with care to

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avoid tripping over his bungling feet. He wondered if George might give out, beyond response to the goad of threat. Then he, Karl, would be worse than useless, alone on that lake. Still he drove on, words of the doctor coming to justify the risk.

"Walk, now," he ordered when George's progress had become a drunken lurch.

After they had staggered on at the slower pace a moment George whined—

"Hear it— hear it—" in a colorless, flat voice.

The boy twisted his head away from the roar of the gale again to catch the hum. It had a grinding quality this time; it was steadier, more ominous. Nearer, surely, and though the ice beneath them was still motionless, he knew that any moment it might yield, that movement meant its rapid dissolution into mush. And that then. . . .

He thought of the waiting village and saw himself wallowing helplessly in crushed ice, the box lost. Then, with a sob in his throat lifted the gun-hand and tried to shove his lids open, for sight. . . just a golden moment of sight! But sight could not be forced.

Realizing, he gave the grunt which meant running again, and this time it came from between jaws that were clamped desperately, for the baleful song of the ice was vying with the wind's roar. And his blind eyes would not let him know more; he dared not ask, for such would emphasize his helplessness, perhaps defeat his purpose.

"But it's movin'; it'll beat us there," whined Holvig.

With a hiss of angered breath, Karl drove the gun barrel deep into his ribs.

"It's their one chance to get help—Run, you fool, run!"

"But it's pilin' up against the east end of the island. It——"

Karl's tripping heart paused. They were near, very near, perhaps. But Petit Blanc was splitting the ice field. He had known it must be moving beyond the island. He had held to the hope it would remain resisting behind it. Now that hope was gone—like his eyes.

"Faster!" he cried. "It's your life, now; fas——"

SUDDENLY THE ICE beneath them swelled and dropped, with a shock. Karl hesitated between strides, heedless of George's cackle of fright. Then gathering himself, he hurled his weight against the larger man to drive him forward. They went down. George, drunk from fear, could not withstand the impact. Karl sprawled, coming up with the weapon in a drenched hand, the other still fast to the scarf.

George, prone on the ice, whimpered, and Karl groped back toward him, fear that Holvig was finally of total uselessness mounting. He kicked the box George had carried and gathered it under his scarf arm, muttering. He lunged against the other's body as the man heaved up to his feet and held his face down that George might not see the utter uselessness of his damaged eyes.

"Only slush, between us an' land!" Holvig cried, grasping Karl's arm.

The boy heard the tremor of madness in the voice, felt the quiver of fear in the body.

"Then run!" he shouted and his own voice crackled. "Run, you——"

He struck out with his gun savagely. The barrel came down on Holvig's cap, a stinging blow, and for the moment the spell of horror put on him by what he saw was broken. He stumbled forward.

The ice beneath them trembled. The crunching drowned the gale. Karl knew he would be forced to shout close in Holvig's ear to be heard. He forgot to be guided by the wind, forgot everything except the nearness of this terrible condition which he could not see, and the nearness of the village, and the box under his arm and the useless creature who led him, staggering, progressing now slowly, again with a rush.

Karl could hear George shouting aloud.

Their footing changed, became hard, irregular. Karl knew they had struck one of the great cakes of drift ice, feet thick, that had been caught floating near the island and locked in by the final freeze. George fell again, Karl tripped, but kept his feet.

"Get up!" the boy raved, kicking the prostrate form. "Get up! Which way, George, which way?"

Oh, for sight! A second of it, a wink of it! He kicked again and stooped to hear, but Holvig, momentarily secure, lay face down, gibbering, heedless of abuse, even of the weapon's threat.

Karl lifted his blind face to the distances, shoved the gun into his shirt-front, dropped the scarf and stood erect. His knees trembled, not from fear or fatigue, though; from responsibility. Unconsciously he felt that his blindness was a weakness for which he was to blame. He patted the box, hitched it

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closer to his side, waved the other hand before him as though he expected to encounter obstacles, and started forward

Rip of wind, sing of ice, crunch and grind and bellow. Then he felt the cake of solid stuff beneath him jolt—and move. He stood still. The wind blew in his ear. The ice beneath him was swinging.

In a chill he knew that his last hope was gone. He could not even hold his course and, desperate after the moment of indecision, he commenced to run, which way he knew not. He felt the ice lift and buckle. It quivered and jolted and he thought it whirled under him; he became dizzy. He halted suddenly, straining to lift the swollen lids—just enough to let light through—and could not. He held the box before him in both hands and reeled along, chance guiding his feet. Then stopped again and felt himself spun to face the gale.

And above the deviling din a girl's voice, prolonged and sharp and cutting the jumble like a knife, calling his name!

Helga!" he cried, a joyous lump in his throat, and flung himself half-way around, running toward the source of the sound.

But was it her voice? he asked himself. Might it not be a trick of his overwrought mind? Might it not?

He gave the doubt credence but did not falter. He fell in the slush and rose and fell again. He ran desperately, new vigor in his joints. Then a foot went through and he lurched forward, falling many paces. He regained balance, took a stride, dropped the box, half turned to grope and retrieve it—and slipped through into the lake.

The icy water squeezed his breath out as it enveloped him clear to his chin and for a moment he was paralyzed. Then he began to battle. He felt the stuff close to mush about him. He pawed for purchase but the edges slivered and gave in long crystals. He broke them down gropingly, flinging his numbing hands out in valiant effort to recover the precious package, knowing that in a breath, perhaps, it might be lost forever in the ice, and that days might elapse before another. . . .

He struck the box, knocked it beyond reach and clawed with cruel fingers at his useless eyes. The pain made him cry aloud and then, threshing about, he had his hands on the package again. He lifted it high in one hand, wriggled about to face the way he thought was land, shot himself chest-high in the water and flung it toward Helga's voice, with the last strength in him.

Then sank back, in an anticlimax of effort. He was unconscious of pain or peril.

LARS LARSEN, half wading, half swimming, keeping on top of the ice by aid of a pike pole gripped in the middle, reached Karl as his movements were becoming too feeble to offset the suck of the water. Others had followed. They dragged the boy to shore, where he laughed weakly as the doctor knelt to look at the blisters that had been eyes. He shut his lips with a moan, the doctor.

"Gouged him, the beast!" he muttered, lifting his gaze to where they were getting a line to Holvig. He opened the lids tenderly.

"But it's no worse, praise God!"

He looked up at those about him, at the girl hanging closest over him, fighting the faintness which blanched her face. Old Jens, weak eyes popping, stood and reached out a gnarled hand to grasp the revolver from the lad's shirt-front.

"Mine?" he whispered. "Mine! And how? How?"

Then Helga drove back the sickness and a flame came into her eyes, a flush to her cheeks. She dropped beside Karl and drew his head into her lap.

"I gave it to him!" she boasted breathlessly. "I was afraid of George, and right—right! George—your smart man, your bright man—has blamed Karl because I would not go to live in his new house. He has wanted to harm Karl for months—he followed him in the woods, he watched and waited—the coward. I was so afraid for him—for Karl—that I let him suffer.

"And I knew that if he didn't harm Karl out there it would be because he was afraid. And I got this revolver—and before he went I told Karl everything so he would know—everything."

"Now—" looking down into the boy's maltreated face— "we have seen what we were to see: that George Holvig has lived lies—lies."

She commenced to cry, looking about at the faces in which understanding dawned so sluggishly.

"Don't you see?" she begged. "Don't you see? He had to get back—for the sick—and for me."

Sobbing, she lowered her cheek to Karl's, her lover's.

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS

HERE is a good word from our old friend, Major W. Robert Foran, whose stories in our magazine the old-timers among you will remember. His letter was written on shipboard on a route very much south of England, back in April. Shipping restrictions and conditions now somewhat interfere with sending magazines abroad as suggested by Major Foran. Until recently we have for several years been sending to American, Canadian and English readers and friends at the front every spare copy of this or any other magazine that we could lay hands on.

We've just had the very cheering news by wireless that U. S. A. has at last declared war on the Huns. I am so glad and know you are also. May she soon make up for the "wait and see" policy and take a big stand. I know you are awfully pleased about it and can imagine what exciting times you are now having over there. Do write me all your news to ———, England. Letters will be forwarded on.

I shall much appreciate any old *Adventures* and other magazines if sent to me care of ———. I'll arrange to have them forwarded on to me.

I am commanding the troops on this transport and have as adjutant an old East African Police friend. A small world, indeed!

Hoping this finds you well, as it leaves me, and hoping to hear from you soon.

—W. ROBERT FORAN.

OWING to a brain-storm on my part, the note from Theodore Seixas Solomons that should have accompanied his story in this issue was printed in the September number in which he had no story at all. I hope it was the heat. To make up for my former mistake I'll make another one by giving in this issue the letter from Mr. Solomons which should have accompanied his story in the April issue. That will mix things up completely and we can all quit worrying. But Mr. Solomons is doing his part and rises to introduce himself according to Camp-Fire custom.

Like your January initiate, Mr. Harrison R. Howard, I too, was born in San Francisco (though at a considerably earlier date); was educated in California schools, became possessed of a desire for some genuine education, and struck out for myself.

But I plunged into the pine forests of the Sierras, instead of the Redwoods of the coast. Winters, I wrote shorthand in the courts, and later took them as a detail for the morning papers. But Summers, I explored the High Sierra crests, photographed, mapped and named their highest peaks, and then went to Alaska in search of loftier ones.

I WAS a Klondiker with London and a Nomeite with Beach, but I stuck to it for ten years or more, while they "beat it" pronto back to the land of pen, paper and publications. But I was sick of writing and thirstier than ever for adventure. Let's see what I did besides climbing a few mountains and learning to handle a canoe in swift water. I prospected with a seventy-pound pack over mushy niggerheads; placer mined; practised law; rafted logs in the mush ice for a Winter's grubstake; wrote and helped act a play; took the long hike to Nome and the Arctic; became a postmaster—I was the "old roadhouse man" of the story, minus the "old"; ran a store; was nearly thrown into a hole in the ice by a "miner's meeting" for something I didn't do (they all say that); surveyed; swam horses packed with gold-dust across freshet-swollen rivers; helped build a railroad; freighted rubber boots with dog-teams across the backbone ranges of the Seward Peninsula, practised law some more; opened up a coal mine; and finally permitted some New York captains of industry to inveigle me into a million-dollar Syndicate—you know the way they "hand it" to us poor innocent venders of Western mines! And then the panic of '98 hit us one mellifluous swat.

SO I very alliteratively shook from my shoes the soulless city's dust and built me—or rather us—a big log house in the Yosemite forests, where the Singer Towers are legion and are fashioned by a greater Architect. There, one day, I saw the prize-story announcement of a big weekly and it suddenly hit me that I had never had a try at fiction, and why not go to it. I did. I wrote an Alaska story, but some instinct told me to forget fact and use my pristine imagination. I just missed a prize, but I got a hundred dollars anyhow, and that was my undoing. It made me think it was easy. It isn't. Believe me, it is a much simpler matter to have a million adventures than to dish up just one of them in the right way. So I'm pulling a harder grinding sled right now than I ever did at sixty below in the Arctic.

As to "He Smile, He Go Sleep," the little mail-carrier is all real, and he lost his life just that way; but there was no question of money, and no locket; and the Eskimo that tracked him for us was not consumptive (except of immense quantities of our

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grub) nor particularly noble: in fact he was the darndest—But why humiliate the poor phantom by telling his unworthy origin? Also, the mail-carrier and the contractor changed names.

THE following illustrates one of the practical workings of our "Ask Adventure" department. Mr. Carson has, of course, in this case done far more for the inquirer than any "Ask Adventure" editor is expected to do, and this inquirer's letter of gratitude is given to "Camp-Fire" merely as acknowledgment of Mr. Carson's personal kindness and not at all as a suggestion that our "Ask Adventure" editors are supposed to go to such great lengths in response to inquiries sent them. Nevertheless, others of them have, out of pure human friendliness, done much the same kind of thing.

RIVERSIDE, WASH.

I am writing you to thank you for the benefit I had from the "Ask Adventure" department of your magazine. On May 8th I wrote to your Mr. Carson, stating that I was weary of New Hampshire and wanted to get some place where I could settle down in the open country, incidentally asking his opinion of Alaska. He gave me the information I requested and then told me why he thought I would make a mistake in going so far into the wilderness with my wife when I could do so much better somewhere else. The result of our correspondence was that I came to this coast by way of Burlington, Wash., his home, where he met us at the depot and spared no pains to get me located. The consequence is that in two weeks I am just where I always wanted to be. But when I tried to express my gratitude to Carson he only laughed and told me that the credit was all due to you, as he was only one of the rank and file.

NOW I feel that the least I can do is to thank you and to assure you that your magazine has made a friend who feels under an obligation that will take much to repay, since the information placed at my disposal by your representative saved me an amount of time and money which I could not have afforded to spend. I may say right here that Mr. Carson's knowledge of the North and West seems to be almost without a limit, while my personal experience, together with the attitude of the "old-timers" toward him, is all the guarantee any one would wish as to his reliability. He told me he had never met you personally and all I can say in regard to this is that you have missed something.

Again thanking you for the valuable assistance "Ask Adventure" has rendered both my wife and self.—J. H. HIGINBOTHAM.

AN EXTRACT from a letter from an Englishman, now a member of the Canadian forces. An adventurous life, truly, yet given here not because unusually adventurous but because it is merely one sample of many thousand such lives. A wonderful brotherhood, this that gathers about our "Camp-Fire" from the four corners of the world. If all could and would tell their tales there would be little need of turning to fiction for thrilling interest. Luckily, as those of you on the inside know, much of these true tales creeps into *Adventure's* fiction stories and gives the foundation of fact that especially appeals to so many of you.

Now *re* myself in brief:—I was born in England in 1879. Hold my fellowship degree of the Institute of Commerce, England, but the wanderlust has always been stronger than my lust for study. I handled horses in the South-African War for the British and New Zealand Governments. Have seen life in many parts since then, including South and West Africa, Tasmania and all over North Island of New Zealand; six years in Canada. Have sold real estate and made plenty money and lost plenty, ditto stocks; worked in the bush, been stock-rider, dock-laborer, checker on banana boats, swagged in N. Z., clerked, insurance, stenographer, dairy farmer and sheep raising; also shipped before the mast, soldiered in Canadian Militia and finally discharged unfit from Canadian Expeditionary Forces, and am now on military work at Musketry School.

Also know France very well. Speak French moderately, smattering of German. Have had many adventures and many ups and downs, but still alive and kicking. Have also written half a dozen stories some long time ago.—Lance-Corporal H. W. HODKINSON, H. Q. School of Musketry, Canada.

I KNOW in advance that you will welcome the story by Talbot Mundy that begins in this issue. Among all our writers no one has been a greater favorite with you. There was a time when there was a story by Talbot Mundy in every number of *Adventure;* for years he was one of our steadiest contributors. Then came a time when we ceased to publish his stories and so many of you have written to ask why that I'm giving here to all of you the simple explanation.

Mr. Mundy used to be one of the fastest writers I have ever known. On occasion he has sat down to his typewriter, written off a story from beginning to end, taken that first draft to our office and sold it as it stood. The most amazing thing about it is that this "rough" draft was as free from mistakes or changes as is the usual final draft that is carefully copied from an earlier one. Indeed, his "copy" was far "cleaner" than most that comes to a magazine. Those of you who write will appreciate the unusualness of this.

BUT he decided he could do better work and, in the end, accomplish more by slower methods. He became a slow producer. Working even harder than before,

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he turned out very few stories instead of very many. Since the time when his stories appeared so regularly in *Adventure* he has written very few tales of any kind. A serial in *Everybody's*, some stories for the *Saturday Evening Post* and, I think, one or two sold elsewhere, these few have been his total output during the last two years or so. These and the serial beginning in this issue of *Adventure*.

His harder, slower working methods have proved their value. The old Talbot Mundy was a good story-teller, the new Talbot Mundy is a far better one. You will find the proof of this when you read "Hira Singh's Tale."

YOU will be interested to know how this story happened to be written. A year or two ago, Elmer Davis, who used to be on *Adventure's* staff, sent me a small newspaper clipping, a news item of a few words stating briefly that a detachment of Indian troops on the French front had performed a certain almost unbelievable feat. Mr. Davis suggested that this might make a wonderful fiction story in Talbot Mundy's hands.

I sent it to Mr. Mundy, he acknowledged it with thanks and I heard no more about it for some time. Then came a letter from Mr. Mundy announcing that the tremendous adventure of those Indian troops had impressed him so that he couldn't get it out of his mind and was planning to make a story out of it, a long story. And that is "Hira Singh's Tale." It is interesting to know that a body of Indian troops seem actually to have performed the almost incredible feat set forth in the story.

I AM glad to add that Talbot Mundy not so long ago became an American citizen, I being one of his two witnesses required by law. I wish our country could gain many more citizens like him. He is chairman of the agricultural committee of his county down in Maine and I understand that that county leads the State and most of New England in its practical accomplishment for war-relief production and conservation of crops. One of his plans is as follows:

I, for example, sent him five dollars in May. He bought me a young pig and arranged to have said pig boarded out. A farmer furnishes care and sty, etc. The farmer and I go fifty-fifty on the cost of all feed that needs to be bought, he getting all dressing. In the Fall the pig, having put on flesh and weight, is sold or butchered and the farmer and I go fifty-fifty on either the money or the meat. Not only have several hundred pounds of meat been raised against the national and international need but there is a chance of legitimate individual profit. Best of all, I am furnished with a photograph of my pig. Indeed, the humorous phases of this pig stunt are one of its best "selling" assets. I've sold several pigs for Mr. Mundy chiefly by reason of the laughs and chuckles those city men got out of owning a pig and having a photograph of it to put up over their desks as a sort of continuous chuckle and a subject for jovial and more or less witty conversation. My own pig has been, quite indelicately, named the Queen of Greece.

It's a laugh, this pig stunt, but it's also an exceedingly practical way of increasing our country's meat production. At last reports it was to be adopted for the whole State of New Hampshire.

Next Spring buy a pig, name it, get its photograph. Write to Mr. Mundy in care of *Adventure* unless in the meantime I can give you State, national or local addresses all over the country. Oxford County Maine, can't supply all the U. S. with pigs. It's a laugh, but it's also patriotism.

WITH his first story in *Adventure*, Buck Connor follows our Camp-Fire custom and gives an account of himself. Into the few words that follow he has condensed a record to make any adventurer proud. And since those words were written he has added another chapter by becoming a commissioned officer in the service of Uncle Sam.

I was born in the sagebrush of Texas, and it happened in San Sabe County; thirty-six years ago. The earlier days of my childhood were spent on a ranch. I ran away from my home at the age of thirteen and for the first and only time in my life I rode a freight train as a "bo." At that time, I could scarcely read or write my own name, and it took the hard knocks of a Summer among strangers to show me where I was sadly in need of something more than a pair of hands.

I WORKED in a soup-house as dish-washer, drove team for a livery stable, sold papers and did all sorts of odd jobs to earn money. Winter found me nicely located on a farm in West Virginia working for my board and schooling.

At the age of sixteen I jumped my age up to suit

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the recruiting officer and enlisted as bugler for the Spanish-American War. In 1899 I went to the Philippines as a bluejacket and did scout duty for two years and eight months. After my return to the States I was sent to the Seaman Gunners' School in Washington, D. C., and Newport, R. I.

I was Custodian of the Army War College, Washington, D. C., from 1903 to 1907 under Generals Barry, Bliss, Wotherspoon and Colonel Reber. Then I answered the call of sagebrush and returned to my Texas where I was foreman of the 2-U ranch on the Colorado.

FOLLOWING a Winter on the range, I accepted the position as bronc rider, pony express and trick roper with Pawnee Bill's Wild West and remained with that show until it was combined with Buffalo Bill's Wild West under the general title of Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Great Far East. I had worked myself up through the arena to the position of secretary and assistant manager of the Pawnee Bill show and went with the new combination as secretary and Indian agent.

A couple of short terms in the Texas Ranger Force with a seasoning of motion pictures from the grease paint to the man behind the camera, directing, about makes my confession complete, with exception of trips to Borneo and detailed campaigning in Mexico with Ortego and Benevedis.

MY SUMMERS are usually spent in the open and there is always a slice of bacon and a hunk of bannock with good black coffee to rinse it down in my camp for an adventurer who cares to spread his bed beside my fire. And I want all Camp-Fire members who have hit the hard trails with me in the past to let me hear from them—the trail is open and the bars are down, so just drop reins and come in.

WITH US OR AGAINST US?

THERE are two kinds of people in this country, and *only* two—those who are loyal to the United States and those who are not. It is time that the line were drawn between them with the sharpness of a knife's edge.

We have been tolerant, for we are a patient and a kindly people. Also we have been asleep. It took nearly three years for the war to reach us; step by step we were drawn into it and no particular one of these many steps, even the declaration of a state of war, was sufficiently bigger than the others to wake us fully, to make us feel that *the* crisis had come, that it was time to stop all drifting and settle down thoroughly on the job.

We have left many loose ends, many things undone, chiefly because we had become used to them. It is time to tie up those loose ends. And the things that cry most loudly for our immediate and forceful handling are the disloyalties we have been allowing to exist in our very midst. It is time to stamp them out.

THE enemy aliens among us have been told to "obey the laws and keep their mouths shut" and we are compelling them to do these things. So far as we are able. But the efficient German system of spying, propaganda, agitation and overt acts continues to operate in this country more effectively than in the other Allied countries. Why is it so much more effective and harmful here? Because we allow it to have a great body of unofficial supporters here in our very midst. Because we allow scores of factions and organizations, hundreds of thousands of individuals, to furnish the Prussian machine over here with tools to work with. Many of these tools do not know they are tools. They are therefore all the more dangerous to our safety.

We can not expect our Secret Service to overcome this huge handicap that we allow to exist. It is up to us to remove that handicap.

THE first and the most obvious step is to crush out the German propaganda machine that the Prussian militarists have been building up in our midst, not just since the war began, but *for generations*. The very heart and soul of their imperialistic world-conquest plan is their system of allowing Germans to settle in other countries but keeping them tied to Germany by invisible chains, despite any oath of allegiance they may give to these other countries. Sometimes the chains are not invisible; in Brazil, Argentina and elsewhere, even in our own country, whole districts or communities are so completely dominated by German blood that they are practically German colonies. But the invisible chains are even more dangerous.

These invisible chains we used to consider harmless enough. We hadn't realized that they were really the outthrust arms of the Prussian octopus, fixing their hold among us, ready to draw us into the mouth of the beast when the right time should come. Harmless little chains that we regarded very tolerantly, very sleepily, very stupidly. Merely the little chains of *keeping up the German speech, the German customs, the German spirit here in America.*

We didn't even know we were sick. So we have let that sickness grow until now there is need of the surgeon's knife. And it is time to apply that knife!

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THE man who thinks the United States is not in very real danger from Germany is a fool. Can any one but an idiot advance the idea that the vast Prussian net whose steel and silken meshes we can see tightening in so many countries all over the world has made any strange exception of *our* country? The Prussians have only one goal, world-conquest; if we've been unable to read the signs for a generation or two, the Prussians themselves have practically told us so since the European war began.

The man who thinks Germany is already defeated is also a fool. Writing far in advance I am willing to wager that even three months later, when you read this, Germany's defeat will be found not much closer than it is now. Splendid France has long since passed the point where she can furnish as many men as are being killed. England still has some margin to spare, but the submarine blockade is choking her. What Russia will do, no man knows. The United States, because of the crime of her unpreparedness, may or may not be able to throw her weight into the balance in time to save the day. Who can say? And if Germany *does* win, we—*are next.* The richest prize in the world, and the easiest big one to pluck. The obstacle to Germany's old dream of South-American dominion. The easiest, logical, sensible, inevitable solution of a war-impoverished but war-strong country's most pressing problem.

YET we continue to let the Prussians bind us with their steel-silk chains. We still allow them to foster here in America the German language, German customs, the German spirit.

It is more than time to act. Stamp out every German, Austrian, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Turkish newspaper and periodical in the United States! If it is printed in any of the languages of the German alliance that alone is enough to damn it. If it is printed in our language but addressed, even in spirit, to those of enemy blood, that, too, is enough to damn it. It is as ridiculous as it is dangerous that such organs should be allowed to exist among us.

If an American citizen of German alliance blood talks his language instead of ours in our country, that is enough. He shows that he is clinging to the old-country ways, the old-country spirit. His sympathies are still, at least partly, with the other side, not wholly with our side. He has not yet become a thorough American. Make him drop his old-country language and use ours. If he refuses, he declares himself an enemy in sympathy. Intern him. Give him every fair chance, for it is our fault that he has been allowed to use it as long as he has and God knows we owe to our many *loyal* citizens of German alliance blood as fine a loyalty as they give to us. But if any man, having had his fair chance to change, persists in using his old-country tongue in our country, that is enough. Intern him.

The German language has no right or place in a country that is fighting Germany. *Stamp it out!* And stamp it out *forever.*

Stamp out every German alliance organization of any kind in this country, local or general, social, athletic, political. Those that were thoroughly loyal to this country have already saved us the trouble.

I KNOW the arguments arrayed against such action, but all of them together cannot weigh against the one single vital fact that *here* lies the heart and soul of Prussian propaganda, of the Prussian system whose one aim is to rule the world, of all the vast net of intrigue and undermining that spreads everywhere among us. I know I am not politic in stating my opinion, but I'm sick of the kind of "policy" that regards the truth as always unsafe and that can see a fly on a barn-door without ever seeing the barn-door. Over a year ago I said much the same thing to you. Today I mean it ten times harder.

BUT there are other enemies among us, other tools of the Prussian system, though some of them don't even know they are being used as tools. Many of them are Americans by blood, tradition and feeling, but, however they twist and turn the facts, they are not on our side. There are only two sides, our side and the other, and they are on the other side. They are against us. I mean all those who, on whatever ground, oppose and hinder the war.

Before a state of war was declared every man had full right to honest opinion for or against it. But after that declaration *our country* was at war and any one of us who does not support our country is not only being disloyal but is *violating the very fundamentals of democracy.* The whole theory of democracy is that the government stands

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for the people as a whole, *is* the people. The people, in forming their government, have definitely given up their right to act as individuals independent of it. Whatever course it follows, they have made themselves a part of it and must follow that course along with it. Otherwise they have severed all essential connection with it and have no right to live under it and accept the protection and benefits it affords. They must be either in it and with it or out of it and against it.

That any Socialists should oppose any chosen course of a people-chosen government is merely funny, since the essence of Socialism is the supremacy of community right over individual right.

Every man is either with us or against us. If he is not with us he is against us, and if he is against us he should be treated accordingly. It doesn't matter whether he is American, German or something else. If he hasn't sense enough to realize he is against us, he should be shown and then treated according to his decision.

MANY and various are the cries they raise against our prosecution of the war. They say it is only Washington that is waging the war, or only the East, or only Wall Street, or only the ammunition makers, or only the friends of England, or only this or only that. The answer to all such cries is that it is *our country* that is waging war and that it is therefore the duty of every citizen of our country to stand by her. Or else admit he is against her and take the consequences. Some of them really believe what they say, but the remainder of them do not. And each and every one of them is working for the enemy and against us. Each and every one of them is being used to fullest efficiency by the Prussian machine, though some of them are not sufficiently intelligent to know it.

If you honestly believe our Government, in warring on Germany, is not carrying out the will of the American people as a whole, then one of two things is true. Either you are mistaken or else the people, including yourself, are to blame, for the *people* created this Government and its machinery of the present Administration and are therefore themselves responsible for it and its every act. If you argue that our political machinery is such that the people as a whole do not do the choosing, then the answer is that in this too the *people* are to blame. *They* created that political machinery; *they* permitted it to continue. If it isn't satisfactory, it is up to *them* to change it. But, *until* then, it is up to them to support the results of the one they have built.

OUT of these many disloyal and undemocratic cries one is particularly irritating—that of some of the Irish, of Irish blood who forget that when an Irishman becomes an American citizen his first duty is to support America, regardless of anything else, even of his hatred of England. He is free to hate England all he pleases—and Ireland has cause to hate England—but *not* at the expense of his duty to America, the land that gave him refuge and welcome, the land he has given his oath to uphold. I am proud of my own Irish blood, but I hate the man, Irish or not Irish, who betrays America, who betrays the country to which he voluntarily gave his allegiance in preference to his old country. And God knows the Irish hate of England has made many Irishmen forget where their first duty and their honor lie.

Are you Irish or American? Are you against us or for us?

MANY things are needed. Stamp out the German language and organizations in this country, and, first of all, the German press. It is either with us or against us. If with us, let it talk American, think American, act American. If against us, the sooner it is suppressed, the better.

And later let us see to it that no newspapers or magazines in *any* foreign language are permitted in the United States; that *no* foreign language is tolerated in this country as a medium of ordinary intercourse longer than it takes a new citizen to learn *our* language; that no social or other organization of any kind is permitted to exist in this country if in any way it tends to keep alive here the customs or spirit of any country other than our own. Let us see to it that immigration is rigidly and intelligently controlled and limited, until we are able thoroughly to absorb the foreign blood we have already let in. And let us see to it that American citizenship is not only made a privilege less easy to attain but let us clean our house until citizenship among us has become a privilege infinitely more valuable than we have let it be in the past.

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But in the meantime, every man is either with us or against us. There is no half-way course. If you are with us, stay and be one of us. But if you are against us, you are our enemy and I pray God that you will be treated as such.

A BRIEF word from our American comrade, Harold S. Lovett, on H. M. S. *Agamemnon* in the Mediterranean, written in May.

Glad to receive yours of March 8th and to hear that we've found time to unroll the old stars and bars along with the other gay bunting which is throwing the dirty Hun back out there in France.

See you got the currency note, but as yet have not received a single copy so if Fritz has got them, well, that's just another debt, and a bigger one that he is betting on, eh?

Well, we are doing very well, and, I'm thinking, should end when the year ends. Here's hoping anyhow.

Hope you're in the best of health. I'm O.K. but pretty busy so I'll quit.

With best wishes.—HAROLD S. LOVETT.

AN INTERESTING little point from Wilbur Hall in connection with his story in this issue.

You can count on the atmosphere in this yarn, and as for the battle I have referred to as contemplated for the latter part of February, 1917, I have the story from a refugee here who was on the Constitutionalist staff in Chihuahua and who says that at about that date he wouldn't have given twenty cents for the chances of avoiding trouble with the United States if the *revoltos* had made their planned attack. It was abandoned for another reason than the failure of the sinews of war to arrive, but I have twisted that around to get it into the story.

LAST year our readers selected by vote the best ten stories published in *Adventure* during 1916. We want our readers to have as much say as possible in making the magazine and this annual vote not only helps decidedly in choosing the writers and kinds of story *Adventure's* readers most want but also gives every last one of you a chance to say his say in the making of the magazine and to have his say count.

It isn't just a question of learning which writers and stories are best liked by you. Last year nearly all our writers received at least some votes and the general result was a long graded list tapering from thousands of points each down to several or even, in a few cases, none at all. The editors learned something about which stories were *not* popular as well as about the preferred ones.

VOTING is simple and easy. On any sheet of paper write your list of ten stories (giving author's names), numbering them in order of preference. If you like add as many as ten more stories by way of second choice or complimentary mention. Add your name and address. That's all.

Any one can vote provided he has read at least *seven* of the issues, for 1917 (January, 1917, to Mid-December, 1917, inclusive). Serials, novels, novelettes, short stories, and articles all rank alike and may be voted for. Poems and "Camp-Fire" are barred. A serial that laps over into 1916 or 1918 may also be included in the vote. The same author may appear in the list as many times as you please. No votes will be counted if they reach us later than December 31, 1917, though allowance will be made for those writing from long distances, particularly the war-front. A list of the winners will be published in a subsequent issue, as was done last year.

IF YOU'VE not already begun marking down your favorite stories better begin doing so now. Don't let stories in the later issues overshadow those earlier in the year merely because you read the former later and have them more vividly in your mind. And don't let the mere length of a serial, novel or novelette outweigh the value of the shorter stories.

—ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

Following is the fourth list of books and periodicals *Adventure* has published for the benefit of all those who are now in our armed forces or expect to be in them in the future. Owing to our country's dismal lack of preparedness when we entered the war, the training that should take years can take only months and must be made as intensive as possible. The publications listed here are a splendid and essential aid to training. Our four lists cover the field as thoroughly as possible.

For All Interested in Military and Naval Affairs

The Mess Sergeant's Handbook, by Captain L. R. Holbrook. Much practical information and valuable suggestions for mess sergeants. George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wisconsin. $1.00.

Lessons in Visual Signalling, by Lieutenant M. A. Palen. Instruction in both wig wag and two-arm semaphore signalling. Lessons so arranged that soldier begins practise work in signalling from first lesson without having to learn whole alphabet. George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wisconsin. 60 cents.

Military Field Notebook, by Lieutenants G. R. Guild and R. C. Cotton. A compact field notebook adopted for use

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of officers and enlisted men. George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wisconsin. 75 cents.

The Naval Militiaman's Guide, by J. H. Barnard. Phraseology; rigs and types of vessels; handling ship's boats under oars and sails; handling of steamers; minimum qualifications of each naval militia grade. D. Van Nostrand Co., 25 Park Place, New York. $1.25.

Bayonet Training Manual. Compiled from manual used by British forces. Full instruction in latest development in bayonet practise. D. Van Nostrand Co., 25 Park Place, New York. 30 cents.

The Star Pocket-Book; how to find your way at night by the stars, by R. Weatherhead. A practical manual for soldiers and travelers. Free from most astronomical data. Longmans, Green & Co., New York. 50 cents.

Notes on Field Artillery for Officers of All Arms, by O. L. Spaulding, Jr. A non-technical exposition of Field Artillery tactics. For officers of all arms. United States Cavalry Association, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. $1.25.

Submarines; their mechanism and operation, by F. A. Talbot. Mechanism and handling of submarines; attacking power, defensive capacity, use of periscope, method of directing fire, etc. J. B. Lippincott Co., Philadelphia. $1.25.

Text-Book on Wireless Telegraphy, by R. Stanley. Longmans, Green & Co., New York. $2.25.

Military Training for Boys, by Majors James A. Moss and M. B. Stewart. A text-book every American boy should own. A help in developing body, character and patriotism. The meaning of loyalty, discipline, self-reliance, respect for law, etc. Care of health, first aid, A B C's of military training. A book of personal preparedness for youth of the country. George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wisconsin. 50 cents.

PERIODICALS

International Military Digest. A monthly review of the current literature of military science. Compiled in encyclopedia form. Edited by large staff of army officers. Cumulative Digest Corporation, New York. Subscription $3.50 per year.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure's* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

A free department for the benefit of those readers who wish to buy or sell back copies of this magazine.

Our own supply of old issues is exhausted back of 1916. Readers report that *Adventures* can almost never be found at second-hand book-stalls. Our office files are, of course, complete and we do not buy back copies or act as agents for them.

Will sell: Two complete sets, either by years or single copies; 5 cents each collect.—RALPH SMITH, 3 Brook Street, Lawrence, Mass.

Will sell: 1915, 1916, 1917, complete. Glad to accommodate any one wishing any particular issue.— E. A. WAMSLEY, 625 So. Flower Street, Los Angeles, Cal.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Adventurers' Club—No connection with this magazine, but data will be furnished by us. Can join only by attending a meeting of an existing chapter or starting a new chapter as provided in the Club's rules.

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. Entirely separate from Adventurers' Club, but, like it, first suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

National School Camp Ass'n—Military and industrial training and camps for boys 12 or over. Address 1 Broadway, New York City.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—A similar organization coöperating with the N. S. C. A. (above). Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, but no question answered unless stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
S. B. H. HURST, Box 892, Seattle, Wash. ★ Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to laws, customs and conditions local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Wallace.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N.Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3
Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. North American Snow Countries Part 1
C. L. GILMAN, 708 Oneida Bldg., Minneapolis, Minn. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. ★ Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. ★ Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

13. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game; minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 283 Fulton St., Berkely, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel: boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

15. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

16. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Sayville, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached.*)

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Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

17. **The Balkans**
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

18. **Asia, Southern**
GORDON MCCREAGH, care R. J. Neuman, 160 Seaman Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

19. **Japan and Korea**
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

20. **Russia and Eastern Siberia**
A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Adventurers' Club, 26 N. Dearborn St., Chicago. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

21. **Africa Part 1**
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

22. **Africa Part 2**
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

23. ★ **The South Seas Part 1**
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

24. **Australia and Tasmania**
ALBERT GOLDIE, care of H. E. ROBERTS, 55 John Street, New York, N. Y. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

Southern California

Question:—"What chances have I got in California if I buy about five acres, twenty or twenty-five miles from Los Angeles? Can I raise enough vegetables and general stuff, with a few chickens to keep self and wife and sell enough to clear myself with the aid of odd jobs?

"What is the best locality and about how much would I have to pay for land? Am writing you because I have been a reader of *Adventure* from the first number and know that those who are connected with it are square and that you will give me the facts as near as it lies in your power."—H. J. HATHAWAY, Detroit, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—The land about Los Angeles is priced 'way above what it is really worth. It is held at prices that range from one hundred fifty to seven hundred dollars an acre. In spite of the excessive prices, many people are buying and some tell me they are making good money by it. The man who is called the Rhubarb King at Pasadena bought eight acres two years ago at thirty-five hundred an acre, in the best residence section of the hills, and made money raising rhubarb. That is one of the exceptions.

I know folks who live on small places, five or six acres, who seem to do very well. A man who is an expert with chickens can make an average of a dollar a hen per year from all he can take care of. I know a Methodist preacher, living not far from my home, who lived at Baldwin Park three years and the last year cleared one twenty per hen on a flock of about two hundred hens. Some make it and some don't. I hate to advise you in this, for if things went wrong you might blame me.

I have known so many that have failed, yet I have known many who won out in good shape. The locality would depend on what you wished to raise. There is a tremendous variation in soil here. I talked with a man last Monday who is raising lettuce and selling all he can raise at ninety cents a crate at the station. Used to be in the cattle business in Kansas—says this is good enough for him. I know the Chinese and Japanese pay as high as forty dollars an acre per annum, rental for good garden land, and make money.

No man should buy land here until he had studied the local market, soil, transportation, water, flood possibilities, varieties of produce most likely to sell well, etc. I have known a man to set out an apricot orchard in a place where he had no possible way of marketing his crop. I have seen many win heavily, yet the army of losers is a large one. Largely lack of judgment.

I have seen a man clear two thousand dollars on one acre of mountain strawberries and others barely clear a hundred on an acre of lowland berries. Never go it blind on buying land. Know what you are doing and what the land will do, before you put up a dollar on it.

If you could get a job here and stay for a few months, you might get on to a good thing. I know of no other way to play safe.

I can not advise you further than this, but if you care to write to me later, giving me some idea of what you can do in the way of work, what kind of truck you would like to raise, etc. I will do my best to give you further advice. I know I have raised double the amount of vegetables that my family of five could eat, on a patch 36x36 feet, on the intensive plan of gardening, right in the city.

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New Orleans by Canoe

Question:—"Three of us plan to start at the source of the Missouri River and finish at New Orleans, traveling by canoe.

1. "Where shall we obtain information on the subject?

2. "What equipment and size of canoe?

3. "What kind of water will we find?"—C. C. M., Kansas City, Kan.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—Write to the Supt. of Documents, Washington, D. C., and ask him for a list of publications relating to the Missouri River. The head of the river is at Gallatin City, Montana; formed by the Gallatin, Madison and Jefferson forks, and from that point you can make the journey you plan with reasonable safety, through the 4,000 miles—always watchful, however, for snags, stones, quicksands, rapids, etc. This is the course of the Lewis & Clark Expedition, which made the trip up in small boats, and some of them down. The Great Falls, and dams must be carried around.

2. For three men, a canoe say, 20 feet long, and tent outfit, cooking utensils, good wool blankets, supplies in water-tight tins, air-tight compartments bow and stern of boat; a 22-caliber, a heavy rifle—30-30, say—and fishing tackle, bait, mostly, but you would have some fly fishing.

3. Most of the distance has been navigated by steamers (from Fort Benton down). Boats of considerable size have been run above Great Falls, too. I think, if I were not in too much of a hurry, I would build a little house-boat below Great Falls, to sleep, eat and float in, using the canoe as tender. The advantage of this would be bunk and shelter always ready—20 feet long, 7 wide, and 22 or 24 inch hull, would serve. Covered with roofing, on light frame, you would have a place for small stove, all your outfit, etc. With oars, you could row a good many miles a day down current—say, 50 or 60.

Naval Academy

Question:—"I am a high-school boy, age 17. I would like to know something about the Naval Academy at Annapolis; how an appointment is secured, what the requirements are and any other useful information."—O. L. Hoffman, Lancaster, Ohio.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—Applicants for entry to the Naval Academy at Annapolis as midshipmen must be between the ages of sixteen and twenty at the time of examination. Minimum height 5 feet 2 inches; minimum weight 100 pounds at sixteen years, with five pounds additional for each year of age up to twenty. Pay, $600 yearly while midshipmen.

Method of entry: Each Senator, Representative, or Delegate to Congress for each State has the nomination of three midshipmen each year. There are fifteen nominations, in the country at large, in the gift of the President. Also there are twenty-five midshipmen selected by competitive examination from enlisted men of one year's service, the selection being made by the Secretary of the Navy. The course is one of four years, graduates being appointed thereafter to the Navy proper.

There are, so far as I know, no other ways of entering Annapolis. You might write to your Senators, etc., in Washington for fuller particulars. Full subjects of examination, times, and places, with other useful information, can be had by addressing the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., Washington, D. C.

Read the five rules of "Ask Adventure" before asking a question.

Pacific Coast Hunting

Question:—"Where is a good place in Arizona or any other Western State to spend several months in the open on a camping trip? What game and fish to be had there? What equipment necessary for two young men used to roughing it and what time best suited?"—W. B. O'Brien, Memphis, Tenn.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Since Arizona men leave their State, as many as can get away, and come to the Pacific Coast for the Summer months, I would not advise you to seek recreation there. In the Fall it is fine in some parts and during the Winter other parts are fine, but Summer puts on a torridness that is hard on the unacclimated.

There are hundreds of places between San Diego and the British Columbia line that are fine. I enclose a card folder giving game and fish laws. Also, forest service rules. When in any forest you will find the rangers ready and willing to give advice on any point and very agreeable fellows to get along with.

The Feather River country is one of the best places for sport, as it abounds with trout, grouse, quail, deer, bear, etc. You can take a section running out from Oroville and range from 300 to 9,000 feet above sea-level, through magnificent forests. Or you can go to the Trinity Forest where the streams are full of both trout and salmon, the woods alive with deer and plenty of bear, wildcats, wolves, etc. Trinity County stands on edge, being almost all steep mountains. Humboldt County is another well-wooded, well-watered paradise for the hunter and angler. There are eight varieties of trout in the State and I have seen specimens twenty-seven to thirty inches long.

Make up your mind where you will make your headquarters and get your outfit there. For equipment, a burro is the first requisite. You can buy one for a few dollars and sell when you leave. They are almost as staple as bacon. With a sawbuck packsaddle and the squaw hitch, if you are not up to the diamond, you can take your outfit in anywhere. First, a tarpaulin seven by fifteen feet for bed. Blankets spread on one end and the other pulls up over, tucking in at sides, a surety that snakes won't get in that way.

Next, a light waterproof tent. Dyas & Co., this city (Los Angeles) sell fine ones of very light weight. Add an ax, a shovel for clearing space for fire, burying waste, etc., guns, tackle, extra shoes—mountain travel is hard on soles—coffee pot, frying-pan, jointed iron rack and flat sheet of iron to use as stove or else a little camp stove. Tin cups, plates and spoons, steel knives and forks, salt, flour, baking powder, bacon, canned tomatoes, rice to take the place of potatoes and there you are. Stay until Fall rains begin.

Glory to Gilead, but I'd like to go along. You can explore several counties with that outfit and have the time of your lives.

I know two young men who killed eleven bears in

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two weeks in the Feather River country. There were eleven hundred fifty deer killed on Southfork Mountain, Trinity County, in the sixty-day season of 1915. Southfork Mountain is forty miles long.

I hope this will give you what you desire in the way of information. Incidentally, I would say, that the bounty on mountain lions is $20 and Humboldt County collected on 493 scalps in eight years, eight months.

No question is answered unless all rules are complied with.

Fox Scent

Question:—"I wish you would send me a recipe for making fox scent."—J. —— QUINEBANG, Conn.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—About the best scent for foxes is plain anise oil, ten or twelve drops near or around a trap, on scent, etc. If a fox is where it gets fish occasionally, fish oil—minnows or the like cut up and rotted in an open-mouth bottle. The fox is very fond of muskrat, and musk is a good scent for water sets—traps set in water or along streams. If you set the trap in a still water, where it is likely to freeze up, take a bag of coarse salt, large enough to rest the trap on, and set in shallow water covering the trap and having a little island on the pan for the fox to step on, in reaching the bait.

A good set is on top of a mound two or three feet high; stick a black feather in the snow ten feet from the top of the mound, after dipping it in anise or musk or both. This set should be put near a fox runway, as near a fence corner they pass or wood lot they go through, or the like.

Read the five rules of "Ask Adventure" before asking a question.

No question is answered unless all rules are complied with.

Tiburon Island

Question:—"I would like some information about the island of Tiburon on the coast of Lower California. It is supposed to be inhabited by cannibals and is said to be very rich in gold and yellow diamonds. Just where does the island lie and are the stories about it true?"—JOHN L. BALANDIS, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—The island of Tiburon to which you refer lies directly west of Hermosillo, in the gulf. The channel is very narrow, almost like a river. Many expeditions have failed to get a foothold there because of the opposition of the Seri Indians who own the island. Two men who were sent there by a San Francisco newspaper were killed when they persisted in trying to go inland.

The tales of cannibalism are regarded now as fakes. The entire tribe of Indians were either killed or removed, by the Mexican soldiers from Hermosillo, and sold into slavery, since Carranza came into power. They are scattered all over Mexico. In 1911 Michael Williams visited the island and wrote an account of his trip which was printed in *Outing* for October of that year. He has just been in this city (Los Angeles) with his wife, returning from another visit to the island.

Mrs. Williams is said to be the first white woman to land there. They report that the only life on the island at this time is turtles, bottle flies and humming birds. It is a safe bet that if the island were as rich as represented, Michael Williams would have it staked by this time, or some syndicate would. I consider the riches to be on a par with the cannibalism. There may be gold there, but our coast men would have it nailed down before this if it were known to exist in large amounts. My advice is *DON'T!*

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN IN FIVE ASKED FOR DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS.

LAWVER, I. H., my son left Tillamook, Ore., a few months ago and went to Willamina Ore. He disappeared from there leaving no word of his destination. He had a Mack truck of two and one-half or three ton capacity. He is 30 years, dark hair, hazel eyes, 5 ft. 10 in.; 170 lbs. Have not heard from him since December, 1915. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address D. N. LAWVER, P. O. Box 441, San Isidro, Calif.

WILHELM, GEORGE WASHINGTON, my son, last heard from in 1885. Has red hair and weighs 175 lbs.—Address MARY ANN WILHELM, Box 582, Johnstown, Pa.

MARSHALL, CHARLES N., last heard of in San Francisco, 1912. Would like to hear from him.—Address ORLANDO A. MACKINNON, 55 Hanson Pl., Bklyn., N. Y.

HAMMER, CHARLES, my brother. Last heard from was in Brooklyn. Perhaps he is in New York. Barber by trade.—Address GEO. HAMMER, Orange County Jail, Goshen, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WATSON, E. E., my son, last heard of at St. Regus, Mont., at which time he was in the employ of Corey, Corey & Steel, railroad contractors; 48 yrs. Business that interests the family demands his attention.—Address MARTHA WATSON, formerly of Wauneta, Nebr., new address Wray, Colo.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

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HONDURAS expedition of 1888. Would like to hear from any of the men who took part.—Address LEROY RUNYAN, Amer. Z. L. & S. Co., Dearing, Kans.

WHITE, JOHN S., my son who disappeared from home four years ago, the fifth of next August. He was heard from while in Wingate, Texas, a year ago. He is 5 ft., 6 in., 140 lbs., 43 years. Any information concerning him will be gratefully received.—Address MRS. S. J. WHITE, 198 Gibson Avenue, Detroit, Mich.

FODDER, "FAT," your old friend from "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine" has news for you and would like to hear from you.—Address J. H., Key West, Fla.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE following have been inquired for in the Mid-September or the First October issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

CONWELL, JOHN A.; Coresuell, Athol G. (Duke McSluhe); Davis, John B.; Eastman, Harvey; Flanagan, George; Fredericks, Frank; Gullette, Willis; Jaffeman, Noelin; Jones, Harry Bainton; McAndrews, Don; McDonald, Geo. A.; Moehrig, Fritz; Spurling, Andrew B.; Thayer, Louis Merton; Thrasher, Cephas Day; Wiley, Thomas W. Mrs. Maude Thomas. Hastlar Gal Breath, Jan Spander, Bertha Wilkins Starkweather.

NUMBERS L. T., 284, C 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address HARRY ERWIN WADE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The November issue of ADVENTURE, which will reach you on September 3d, will be another short-story bonanza. Besides those mentioned on page 2, there will be the following ten fine stories:

A Spur for a Jaded Nag *By Edgar Young*

He was down and out, a dirty beggar in a Peruvian town, the result of native liquor—but he was an American and when the crisis came he straightened up to meet it.

The Molly Man *By Hapsburg Liebe*

Reform, never easy, is simple compared to what *Hartley Brighton* faced. Imagine the proposition before a city-bred profligate trying to make a success of himself in a Tennessee mountain logging-camp!

Loot of the *Aztec Chief* *By Arthur James Hayes*

The story of a hunt for the sunken cargo of a Venezuelan treasure-ship, long submerged on a reef in the Caribbean Sea.

Hira Singh's Tale Part II *By Talbot Mundy*

Behind them Constantinople is in jet blackness. A loyal Sikh regiment has done what seemed impossible—escaped from the Germans. But they are not yet out of the trap and the road ahead is one of untold hardship and internal dissension.

Kinnikinnick *By Hugh Pendexter*

Indian cunning matched against the sagacity and woodsmanship of a white hunter, in the days when Kentucky was the Western frontier.

Khlit *By H. A. Lamb*

A glimpse of life in the camps of the sixteenth-century Cossacks—men who gloried in fighting and were ready at all times to unsheathe the sword against Turk, Tatar or Pole.

Ritter's Pond *By E. E. Harriman*

Beggared by a drunken father who sold his land for a song, *Bill Garvey* still has his brains and Missouri shrewdness to right the wrong which has been done him.

The Slave Soul *By Frederick Simpich*

The Philippine Islands. A story of white men among the Igorots in their mountain strongholds.

The Water Cover *By W. A. MacDonald*

A man-hunt in the forests and wilderness of the North woods.

Off the Trail *By Robert Russell Strong*

Away up in the bleak Alaskan wilderness, pretense is swept away and friendship must stand the acid test—and there the dog comes into his own.

FIRST NOVEMBER ADVENTURE

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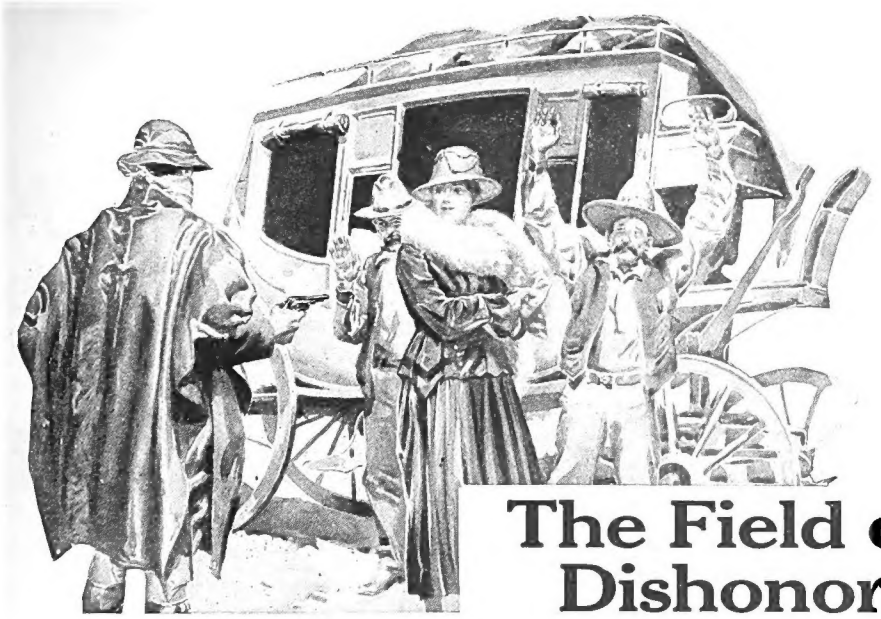
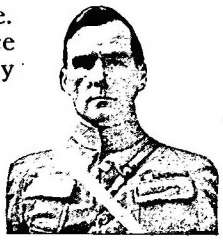


The Field of Dishonor

She had never seen a highwayman before. This one had an army officer's boots nd the manners of a gentleman. She laughed and told him so.

But it was serious business for him. He faced death, prison, disgrace.

It is a story so startling and curious, with its tangle of romance nd adventure—with its daring, thrilling climax—that it could only e told by that master of romance—



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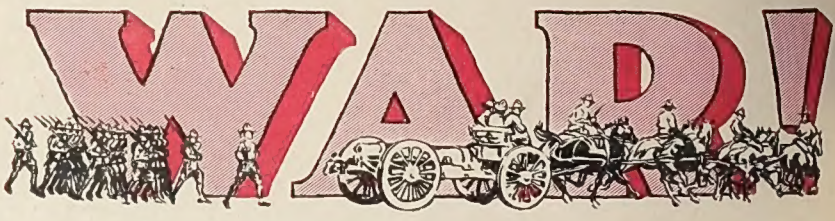

YOU can't possibly read everything that will be published about the war, but you will want to know the conditions that surround the relative or friend who is in service—his movements, hardships, duties and recreations—from the calling of the first draft army to the end of the present conflict.

EVERYBODY'S will present authentic information in a big way through fully illustrated articles by trained correspondents. The features that have appeared in EVERYBODY'S for the past several months by or with the approval of President Wilson, Lloyd George, Herbert Hoover, Premier Lvoff, Ian Hay, Jeffery Farnol, Lord Northcliffe, Cardinal Mercier, and other statesmen, soldiers and journalists of international prominence give earnest of the importance and timeliness of future articles.

Fake dispatches, false rumors and unconfirmed reports make it impossible to rely on newspapers exclusively. Magazine reading is essential if you are going to follow America's part in the world war.

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Begin with "The Killing of Rasputin," the first complete inside story of the powerful Russian monk, as told by the assassins to Lincoln Steffens, in the

October

Everybody's

On News-stands September 22d

"Judith of Blue Lake Ranch," a serial novel by Jackson Gregory, begins with this October number. You will want to read, from start to finish, this gripping story of a girl who tackles a man's job in the great Western outdoors.

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